

THE ARGOSY.

JUNE, 1883.

WINIFRED POWER.

CHAPTER XVI.

SECRETS AND SURPRISES.

FROM the closed door of the box-room came a low muttering that was sufficiently uncanny.

Sir John advanced and turned the handle. The door did not yield, for it was locked ; but instantly the muttering ceased.

"The key!" commanded the master of the house. Shaking all over, Mrs. Hatherley produced it from her pocket. Sir John unlocked the room and entered ; as many as could reach peering curiously over his shoulder. The room was unlighted ; but the gas-lamp in the passage illuminated it partially, and flashed upon the pale face and crouching form of a youth, lying huddled up on a mattress in one corner of the room. It was young William Hatherley. Judging by his excited air and wildly-staring eyes, as well as by the sounds that they had heard, he was in the delirious stage of a fever. At sight of him his sisters burst into tears ; but his mother, released from all necessity of secrecy at last, approached him, and began soothing him with a passion of affection that was infinitely piteous.

"What is the matter with him ? How long has he been in this state ?" enquired Mark, in consternation.

"He has been here hardly a week," explained the mother. "When he first came he was only weak from want of food. But one evening he slept out in the rain—it was so lonely for him here—" she said, with a kind of resentment, "and got wet to the skin. And since yesterday he has been delirious.—Oh, my boy ! my boy !"

"Where did he go when he went out in the rain ?" asked Sir John, sardonically.

Nobody answered ; and the speaker's eyes ranged interrogatively over the faces of his hearers.

"The keeper of the Blue Dragon told me that Mr. William Hatherley had been there one evening. Of course, he did not know

he was hiding here," added Susan, enchanted to be of importance.

"Just as I expected!" commented Sir John. "Exposure and want do a great deal, but dissipation does more."

"The first thing to be done now is to send for a doctor, and put the lad into a decent bed," said Mark—and he spoke sternly.

"A mattress was all I could get brought in," whimpered Mrs. Hatherley, with characteristic want of logic, detecting some implied blame to herself in her nephew's observations.

Sir John seized hold directly of her incautious words. "Somebody must have been Mrs. Hatherley's accomplice in this," he said sharply. "Who was it?"

A dead silence.

"How long ago is it since you first began to hear noises here?" This question was addressed to Susan.

"Continuous, sir, I have only noticed them these four or five days. But off and on there have been queer things all the winter."

"And then we wonder that my Psalter is stolen!" exclaimed Sir John, and shrugged his shoulders impatiently at Mark's low-toned protest—"Father!"

"William is no thief!" cried Mrs. Hatherley, turning almost savagely upon her brother-in-law.

"Liars and deceivers may easily be thieves. I shall take the night to reflect upon all this. And to-morrow I shall decide upon the measures to be taken for recovering my property and"—(with a sneer)—"purifying my house."

And having thus spoken, Sir John descended the stairs.

Through Mark's care, Dolly energetically aiding, a doctor was sent for, and William was removed to a proper room. The doctor did not think very badly of the patient, but administered a sedative, and recommended quiet and care.

A very sharp investigation on the part of Sir John established the fact that Mrs. Hatherley's accomplice had been the butler: who was forthwith dismissed. He admitted that William Hatherley had once or twice before during the winter slept in the house; and the date of one of these sojourns corresponded nearly enough to the hypothetical date of the disappearance of the Psalter. This fact Sir John was never tired of hinting at, working Dolly almost to a frenzy by it, and reducing Florence to helpless tears. Mrs. Hatherley took the insult with comparative tameness; for in her purblind, foolish way, she was apparently incapable, for the moment, of seeing an inch beyond the delightful circumstance that she had at last her son openly under the same roof as herself, and could lavish her fondness on him. Thanks to Mark's steady partisanship, no necessary care was wanting to him, and in a very few days he began to recover with all the elasticity of the incurable ne'er-do-weel.

For years William Hatherley had been a thorn in the side of his family,

and was looked upon by all of them, except his adoring mother, with the scantest favour possible. He had been expelled from school ; and after an interval of idling, had tried one situation after another, only to lose them all. Lazy, insolent and dissipated, he had disgusted every friend he possessed. Long ago Sir John had refused to have anything more to do with him, and Mark, although more merciful, now that mercy was a duty, had not shown himself one whit more indulgent. But however great his scorn at an ignoble form of dissipation, he could not bring himself to share his father's professed views as to the disappearance of the Psalter. His doubts, indeed, arose less from any belief in William's honesty, than from the utter absence of proof. To his upright mind, there was no more reason at present for accusing one person in the house than another. He could not understand why his father would not sift the matter with the help of the police, and fasten the charge upon someone. "It is intolerable to me to live in the midst of all these vague suspicions," he frequently said, and with growing impatience. "I do entreat, sir, that you will take some steps in the business. In this way, you will neither recover your Psalter nor detect the thief. It is inconceivable that you should care so little for an object of such value."

Sir John gave one of his mysterious, disagreeable smiles.

"I believe my uncle would prefer not to discover the thief. He would rather like William to be the scapegoat," suddenly said Dolly.

It was at breakfast that this daring remark was made, and a thunderbolt falling upon the table could not have caused more utter consternation. Sir John glared at his audacious niece with an ire which gained enormously in force from speechless, sheer amazement. Had the tea-urn all at once bounded up and struck him, he could not have been more astonished. Dorothy took his Medusa-like glance with much intrepidity, although the colour deepened in her peach-like cheeks. Mrs. Hatherley shrank together as if all the breath had been taken out of her body, and Flossie turned as pale as a sheet.

"Will you be so good as to repeat that observation?" Sir John requested, in slow, portentous tones.

"I don't think there is any necessity for repeating it," replied Dolly, promptly. "I think you all heard it."

"Leave the room," commanded her uncle.

"Certainly." She rose and made for the door.

"Oh stop!" cried out her mother. "John, don't be angry with her. She did not mean—she does not know——"

"I do mean. I do know," exclaimed Dolly, passionately turning and facing them all. "I mean that it is far better for us all to go and beg our bread through the streets, than to stay here on sufferance, and be insulted for our pains. I know that we are neither welcome nor wanted. I know that the food we put in our mouths is grudged to us; that our word is not believed, nor our feelings considered, and

that the only use we are of in the house is just to—to be made *cats'-paws* ! ”

At this point, Dolly's flaming eyes fixed themselves on Gertrude. Her eloquence, having exhausted its venom, abruptly ceased.

“As far as I am concerned,” replied Sir John, icily, “you can all of you go to-morrow.”

Upon this, a storm of sobs broke from Mrs. Hatherley; Flossie shivered; and her sister, not quite sure of what might be going to happen to her, escaped with trepidation upstairs.

For the rest of the day, the atmosphere in the house was charged with electricity. Poor Dolly was out of favour with everybody, except, indeed, Gertrude Dallas: who, rather diverted than otherwise at her outbreak, treated her with a patronising kind of admiration, that nearly drove her wild. Mark, although he, too, was secretly amused (never having expected such revolt from Dolly) was still far too great a stickler for authority to encourage his little cousin in rebellion: while as for Mrs. Hatherley and Flossie they were simply scared out of all power of judging. The bare notion of being driven from The Limes, and of having to face hardship and effort, made them shiver; and Sir John's wrath fell upon them like a blight.

He was to the last degree incensed; walked up and down his library, declaring that they should go—go; and would listen for a long time neither to reasoning nor entreaty. Mark, in vain at first, tried to point out to him that the general discomfort of the family relations arose primarily from the missing Psalter, and would never cease until that mystery was elucidated. In vain William Hatherley himself, fairly convalescent now, shuffled into the library, and, with a kind of sulky earnestness, protested his innocence; and with a kind of feeble resentment, demanded that, in common justice, some effort should be made to discover the thief. Sir John was obstinate; glowered at the petitioners, and said he knew what to think. But when this kind of thing had lasted for a day or two and everybody but Gertrude (who remained as cool as a cucumber) was worked up to the highest pitch of nervous irritation, Sir John, as if suddenly yielding, spoke.

“Very well, I will advertise.” He said it in a tone which plainly conveyed that his concession was wrung from him by entreaty, and was in no way suggested by conviction. But he persisted still in managing the matter himself privately, and without any intervention from the police.

A day or two later, an advertisement, very cautiously worded, appeared in the *Times*. It stated that a thirteenth century Psalter had disappeared from a private collection, and that a reward of twenty pounds would be offered for its recovery.

A week elapsed, and no answer came. Then the advertisement was renewed.

Meanwhile things at The Limes, except for the sullen airs of

William Hatherley, and a brooding presence of suspicion, had resumed their usual course.

At the end of a few days more, Sir John received an answer dated — Paris, and signed, Clémence Suchard. The writer revealed herself as the housekeeper of a celebrated bibliophile, lately deceased, of the name of Morel, and stated that she believed herself able to throw some light upon the missing Psalter. Her attention had only just been drawn to the advertisement, or she would have written before. On a particular evening in February, almost immediately after the siege was raised, her late master had received a visit from a young man, short, dark and thin, who had offered him an illuminated MS. for sale. Her master was very ill at the time, and she, unwilling that he should be excited, had hovered about the library so as to give the visitor warning to depart at the first signs of undue agitation. In this way, she had caught some of the conversation, and gathered that the Psalter was a very old, curious and valuable one. For the rest, she had not seen the MS., nor was she at all sure that her master had bought it. The young man had been requested by him to return on the following morning, and had done so; but on that occasion Madame Suchard was out, and could not tell what had happened. Her master usually told her when he bought anything particularly precious; but in the last weeks of his life, he was much altered, and inclined to make a mystery of everything he did. He had possessed a number of illuminated MSS., and all would shortly be for sale. Meanwhile, if the owner of the missing Psalter would give a detailed description, Madame Suchard might be able to afford him more accurate information.

This letter, which arrived at breakfast-time, was read aloud by Sir John, all the members of the family being present (except Gertrude, who was generally late, and William who, in virtue of his past semi-invalidism, and because his presence was detestable to his uncle, still had his meals in his room). A slight smile of triumph curled Mrs. Hatherley's lips, "Short, dark and thin. The description corresponds exactly."

"To whom?" asked Sir John, fixing his cold eyes upon her.

"I don't think I need say to whom."

"I wish you to say it."

"To Mr. Richard Dallas, then," replied Mrs. Hatherley, with a movement of her head.

Her brother-in-law smiled unpleasantly. "Several young men are dark, short and thin. William is, for instance."

The colour rushed into Mrs. Hatherley's face. "Again!" she exclaimed, in a choked voice.

"But William was not in Paris in February," observed Mark, who had looked a little staggered on hearing the letter read.

"How do we know where he was?" retorted his father, sharply. "Do we ever know where he is, or what he does, or by what means he earns or otherwise obtains his livelihood?"

A pause. Mrs. Hatherley and Florence were speechless with agitation, while, as for poor Dolly, she was white to the lips. To her it was no consolation to think that, instead of her brother, Richard Dallas might be the thief. Her own mental explanation was a very different one. She believed that her uncle had made a present of the Psalter to Gertrude!

"I am unwilling to suspect anybody," resumed Mark; "but you cannot deny, sir, that the coincidence of the offer to M. Morel of the Psalter with the date of Dallas's departure from this house is a striking and significant one."

"I see no coincidence," replied Sir John. "When Dallas left me he did not go to Paris, but to The Hague. Of this I have proofs in his own letters to me, and in his family's letters to his sister."

The conversation was abruptly arrested by the entrance of Gertrude. She came in looking as lovely and as self-possessed as usual, and apologised smilingly for being late, as the gentlemen rose to receive her.

"Any news about the Psalter?" she enquired, carelessly.

Sir John handed her the letter.

She read it with uplifted brows, but even the lynx eyes watching her could detect no sign of agitation or of guilt.

"After all, one does not know if this Psalter be really yours," was her sole remark, addressed to Sir John.

"That is a point which will soon be settled in part. I shall write to an agent in Paris to-day, and instruct him to attend the sale."

As a result of this move, Sir John announced after another fortnight that his Psalter was *not* among those belonging to M. Morel's collection. "At the same time, that does not prove," he added, "that it was not the one offered."

This there was no denying, and the mystery remained as great as ever. Again Mark asked his father what he intended to do, and again he was met by the answer that, in all probability no further steps would be taken. Urged by his son to state the cause of this inaction, Sir John merely answered that, however obnoxious certain members of his family might be to him, he yet had some respect for the dignity of his name. This, of course, meant that he still suspected William; but to Mark his obstinacy in this regard was inexplicable, on every hypothesis except one, from which his loyal nature shrank. The idea had at times presented itself to him that Sir John hoped, by constant hinting at his secret convictions, to wear out the Hatherleys' patience, and drive them from the house. William had already left it in dudgeon, amid floods of tears from his mother; and while Mark could not pretend to regret *him*, he was too chivalrous not to be revolted by the notion of seeing his aunt and her daughters turned adrift. So capricious a change of conduct, after years of generosity, would be too heartless, and but a little time back Mark could not, even for a moment, have thought his father capable of it.

But Sir John was strangely altered : harder—more bitter—more mocking—and stonily reserved. What had worked this change Mark was perplexed to think : first one explanation, then another presented itself to him, and there was one which recurred oftener and dwelt longer in his mind than all the rest.

In the midst of these perplexities, a letter arrived from Paris, announcing that Mr. Russell was dying, and this was quickly followed by a telegram with the news that he was dead. Some notice had to be taken of the event, of course ; and, as Sir John curtly stated that his health would not allow him to attend the funeral, it was decided that Mark should go. He was rather angry with himself to find that the idea of meeting Winifred again did not displease him ; but he was careful to conceal the discovery under the most impenetrable reserve.

Mark was ascending the stairs to begin his preparations for an immediate journey, when he was stopped on his way by Dorothy. Worn out and grieved, more than anybody guessed, by the events of the past few weeks, the poor little thing looked like the ghost of her once winsome self ; and Mark, awaking with a man's tardy perception to the fact, glanced at her with a new-born pity. She raised her eyes supplicatingly to his face, and begged him to let her go with him to Paris.

"It is no favour," she added. "In this way my uncle will be released from one, at least, of his burdens."

"Burdens ! Why, what nonsense !" said Mark, kindly, yet a little disconcerted, for did not the speech tally with his own secret thoughts ? "You can come if you really wish it, Dolly ; but things in Paris are beginning to look rather black. You could not stay there if any political troubles broke out."

Dolly could stay as well as Winifred, she said, or go with her wherever she went. The future did not matter ; it was only the present that was intolerable, and leave The Limes she must. Mark listened thoughtfully, very well disposed to sympathise with her, yet unwilling to discourage her energy. Might she not really be cast off one day, and have to earn her own livelihood ? Nevertheless, he was averse to any hurried decision. "Why not wait a little," he at length asked.

"I have waited long enough," cried Dolly, and clasped her hands with a distress that was positively pathetic. "Everything is too odious. That detestable Miss Dallas !" she whispered. Then, detecting the dawn of a protest in her cousin's face, she added, passionately : "Mark, I believe my uncle has given *her* the Psalter, and does not choose to confess it."

Mark stepped backwards startled. The idea was fantastic, but in the darkness pervading the affair, any suggestion, however unlikely, seemed like a ray of light. He promised Dolly that she should go with him ; bade her pack up, and engaged, as soon as his own preparations were completed, to announce her departure to Sir John. On enter-

ing the library an hour later for this purpose, he had not crossed the threshold before he stood rooted to the spot with surprise. For erect by the old man's chair, flushed and triumphant, was Gertrude. And with both her hands clasped in his, Sir John was looking up into her face, and speaking rapidly, his own countenance aglow with an expression which told its own tale. After his first stare of amazement, Mark prepared to beat a retreat; but his father called him back, and, with a solemnity not to be described, informed him that in Miss Dallas he beheld the future mistress of The Limes.

CHAPTER XVII.

THE BEST SLEEP OF ALL.

WITH a heavy heart, Winifred had gone upon her lonely journey, and reached the altered Paris, so full to her of associations and of memories that had turned to ghosts. The closing terrible scenes of the Commune were still in the future; but the siege had left moral as well as material traces which she was quick to note. But more than this, she herself was changed; and the hundred familiar sights and sounds, recalling her so abruptly to a life which had lost its old charm, were fraught with a restlessness that yet was not all pain, but was born of the contrast between the present and the past.

Winifred, her face still turned expectant towards the light of a magic dawn, was tuned up to a pitch of endeavour that made all the traversed years seem paltry to her. In this solemn yet excited mood, she crossed the threshold of her old home, involuntarily vowing to herself as she did so that she would stoop to no compromise, nor descend an inch from her stand-point. How she should meet Mrs. Russell was rather a problem to her: she hoped almost that she might see her uncle first. But at the door of the sick-room the two women met.

"I am glad you are come," said Mary, ungraciously. "I am quite worn out with nursing. And, ungrateful though you are, I suppose you will still have the conscience to do something for your uncle."

Winifred recoiled. She expected Mrs. Russell to have been informed by Sir John of her conduct, and she was prepared for reproach, and even a certain amount of vituperation. But this cold, almost offensive assumption of her selfishness, this unquestioning accusation of callousness to blame and to remorse, took her completely by surprise.

"My one desire is to be with him," she answered gently, nay, quite humbly.

"I am glad to hear it," replied Mary Russell, and swept past her in marked disdain. Winifred, opening the door softly, entered the sick-room and approached the bed whereon her uncle lay. He raised his eyes and looked at her.

"I have been waiting for you, Winifred," he said. "You are come, at last."

"You know how willingly I would have come sooner," she answered, sitting down beside him and taking the wasted hand in hers.

"Your aunt wanted you. And yet, what right, after all, had I to call upon your bright young energies or your precious time?" He spoke dreamily, his eyes fixed far beyond her, as though he were following some train of thought evoked by his own half wistful allusion to her energy and her youth.

"What right?" echoed the girl almost passionately. "What better right could you have than the love you have made me feel for you?"

He smiled. "A good hearing, Winifred. But we laggards in the march of life should not summon the vanguard to our aid."

She found him just as she had always known him—patient, brave, sympathetic with the aspirations and the efforts of others, and full of a tenderly humorous appreciation of the world and its ways. What made the difference in him—a difference so heartrending—was his now unconcealed, unconcealable longing to go. Doubtless it had often possessed him of late years, and the tardiness of its fulfilment had been the heaviest portion of his burden, but she had never guessed how much the knowledge of his mood would strengthen her own sorrow. Still, he, who had ever been so kind—was it possible that he could remain blind to the sadness of loving faces, and insensible to the touch of detaining arms? This was the question that, almost rebelliously, as the days went on, Winifred asked herself in the long watches of the night, as she sat beside the still form, hushed to a composure that wrapped it like a shroud. He did not need much waiting upon, or willingly kept them: but sometimes quite suddenly a paroxysm of pain would seize him, and it was the fear of this that made her never easy unless she watched.

He rallied a little for a time, and would talk to her with something of his old animation; and, Winifred, looking back afterwards to those hours, felt that, in spite of the core of anguish in them, she could not have spared one.

Too rarely, alas! in the turmoil and heat of life, in the clash of selfish strivings and the din of discordant claims, are such high, solemn moments known to us. They vibrate for a space too brief in our souls, then die away like the final faint notes of a psalm.

Winifred was almost always alone with her uncle, for although it could not exactly be said that Mary neglected him, she left the greater part of the nursing to her niece. The husband and wife had never been companions in the best sense of the word; but they had lived together for a quarter of a century, and Mary, the slave of habit, like all indolent persons, shrank from the parting that would rob her of her most indulgent friend. For all her self-complacency,

she had an uneasy fear of loneliness ; and the thought that she might occasionally have to exert herself in the future to be quite comfortable, shook her uncertain soul with tremors of vague dread. Between Winifred's bright activity and her husband's intelligence, she had rarely felt the necessity of exertion. But, once alone and thrown upon her own resources, what should she do? This tormenting thought recurred incessantly ; and in spite of her resentment, she began again to lean weakly on Winifred, who, finding her often in tears, and touched by the spectacle, met her with an infinity of tenderness and pity.

At last, one day she even approached the subject of Martha Freake. Mrs. Russell immediately broke out into reproachful wailings.

"Everybody was very unkind to her—John—Winifred—they were all the same. No consideration for her. Nobody ever had considered her. Her life had been a martyrdom, one continual struggle with inclination, and all for the sake of gratifying others. Nobody ever knew what she had suffered. Whatever she had done wrong in her life—and it was not much—she had more than expiated it. It would be very hard on people if they were always to be having the follies of their youth cast in their teeth. She had never expected to be in her present position. She might have married brilliantly."

"You could not have married a better man than my uncle," flashed out Winifred, half in indignation, half to stop this sudden outpouring of temper.

"I don't speak of his virtues," retorted Mary, with some asperity, and feeling, perhaps, that people's virtues had often made exorbitant demands upon her. "You need not take me up like that, in your unkind, ill-natured way."

Winifred, rather angry, sat silent until the sound of her aunt's resumed sobbing again struck a chord of compassion in her, when she said gently: "I know that you are displeased with me for many things, but I might, perhaps, be of comfort to you yet, if——" here she hesitated for a moment—"if you would only be just."

"It is not so easy to be just," answered Mary, ungraciously ; "especially when one gets no help from those who should encourage one. If my brother John ——" she stopped abruptly, as if afraid of committing herself.

"Oh, tell me!" cried Winifred, impetuously, and she seized her reluctant hands. "Dear aunt, be frank with me for once. You admit that there was injustice. You say——"

"I admit nothing," interrupted Mrs. Russell. "What is Martha Freake to you or to me? Why did you not worry John instead of me? I expect you did, only that he would very soon silence you."

She was annoyed at her own incautiousness of speech, and yet the habit of regarding herself as a victim had so far killed all remorse in her, that she would have given Winifred her confidence had she dared.

It was only a half-superstitious dread of John, a vague terror as

sullen as Caliban's, that held her back. She was very angry with him of late, having written often in vain for money; and while still shrinking from any betrayal of him which could seriously compromise herself, she would have revelled in such safe luxury of revenge as consisted in exposing him to Winifred, who would be sure not to use the knowledge in any dangerous way.

The person from whose society Winifred gained most diversion in these sad days was Mrs. Dallas.

That good little woman was quite unchanged. Just as placid as ever; as uncomplainingly incapable of grasping the realities of life; as respectful towards the unaccountable Mr. Dallas; as convinced as of old of the sedative virtues of raspberry jam. It was as good as a comedy to hear her talk about the siege of Paris. She regarded that tremendous event principally in the light of the difficulties which it had thrown in the way of her marketing.

"Fancy, my love, fifteen francs for a fowl; and at last they could not be got even for that."

"I am sure you look as if you had lived on the francs instead of the fowls," said Winifred, laughing. "And what was Mr. Dallas doing all the time?"

"He helped in the defence, and made several valuable suggestions to the authorities, I believe. They have given him the Legion of Honour, and he is more than satisfied."

"I think it is the utter impossibility of doing anything with the honour except wear it, which makes it valuable in papa's eyes," remarked Georgie, who had grown very tall and rather pretty, and looked hungry and sharp, and as pert as ever.

Mrs. Dallas had expressed great pleasure at Gertrude's position.

"Sir John is, I understand, so kind; and it is a great comfort to think of her giving thorough satisfaction to her employers."

This view of Gerty as the conscientious governess was rather trying to Winifred's gravity; but she would not have destroyed the amiable delusion for the world. Consequently, she remained discreetly silent. One day, the conversation turning upon The Limes and its inhabitants, she was presently much surprised at a casual mention by Georgie of the missing manuscript.

"The Psalter lost! Why, Dick, you never told me," exclaimed Winifred, in surprise, to Richard Dallas. She had seen the young man oftener than any of the others, and as he had asked her a good deal about the Hatherleys, it did seem strange that he should have been silent concerning such a loss.

"I never thought about it," returned Dick, with rather an odd smile. Georgie, delighted to be able to relate something, poured forth the whole story as Gertrude's letters had communicated it. "Gerty is convinced that William Hatherley is the thief; while Mrs. Hatherley absolutely had the effrontery to hint that it might be Dick!" she added. With a laugh, Dick rose and began whistling softly to the canaries. He

was evidently sick of the subject, which had been discussed doubtless in the family a hundred times already.

Winifred's knowledge of *The Limes* and its inhabitants enabled her to fill up many of the outlines of Georgie's story, and she went home thinking curiously about it, and in a brighter, more interested mood than she had known for many a day.

There is a sort of irony about impending sorrow which often seems to seize upon just such moments to deal its final blow.

Winifred knew as soon as the door was opened to her, and before the servant could speak, that her uncle had been summoned. She had been away from him hardly longer than an hour, had left him in a frame of mind genial even for his unfailing sweetness, and now when she returned—what a change! The doctor had been called; Mary, crouched in a chair beside the bed, was sobbing violently; one or two people stood about; and he, the object of all this commotion, lay speechless, and still, save for an occasional quiver of pain.

With one irrepressible sob of agony and awe, Winifred hurried to him, then controlled herself and stood still. Oh! impotence of human love and human effort, what bitterness is like unto thine? Gone, gone all that they had loved and praised in him, the kindly tones, the sparkling wit, the answering glance. Nothing left but this poor body, and in that no life that was not pain. To stand there and do nothing in help was hard; and Winifred wrung her hands together in one passionate, unspoken prayer for the strength to endure to the end. To endure and be silent—last poor achievement of a love which death had mastered.

How long the struggle lasted she never knew. The moments seemed to drop one by one down a silence unending as eternity. Every thought in her was distilled to the longing that he would speak one word to her before he went. At last the mystic wrestle ended; and he opened his eyes and looked round upon them, with the splendour of final renunciation in his transfigured glance. His wife gave a kind of terrified gasp, and sank upon her knees beside the bed; but Winifred drew closer to him and gently put her arms about him. Softly, as she might have clasped a child, she pillowed the noble grey head—grey before its time—upon her breast, and very tenderly, reverently and solemnly, laid her warm young lips upon it in loving, last farewell. He was passing away very quietly now—all struggle over; and, relieved at last from the terrible tension of watching, she felt her eyes fill with tears as she remembered how small had been the measure of happiness in his life. All the pathos of his failure, of his wasted talents and blighted hopes, was present to her; and while her heart swelled with tenderness at the recollection of his gentle fortitude, her love was glad at last that he should be parted from the burden which love could lighten not nor share.

Darkness had already gathered over his sight, but he groped with his hand until it met his wife's bowed head. There his touch rested

kindly, perhaps forgivingly, for all that he had felt and never said. He did not speak even now, although her sobs grew louder; but his instinct, quick to respond even in this supreme moment, possibly comprehended the dumb supplication which caused Winifred's arms to tremble. For he made a movement at last, as if to turn towards her, then even as he murmured, "Do not mourn, dear; I am tired glad to go," his head fell backwards on her shoulder, and he went.

CHAPTER XVIII.

"WHERE THOU GOEST I WILL GO."

THE first thought that brought Winifred any comfort after her uncle's death was the recollection of Martha Freake.

In the sad concluding weeks of Mr. Russell's illness she had found no leisure to look for her; now she remembered her as the one human creature, she knew, whose need of solace and of help could solace her own boundless desolation.

Her aunt's peevish grief only worried her: such weak complainings jarred on the solemn silence that loss had left in her own aching heart. Visitors, also, were constantly coming in, and Mary saw them all. In the platitudes of consolation offered by them, suggestions as to mourning, and conversation regarding the delayed funeral, Mrs. Russell constantly forgot her sorrow. The anticipation of Sir Charles Russell's arrival was a great tonic to her. He was the head of the Russell family, and a baronet whose life had been unexpectedly, and, as Mary thought, inappropriately prolonged.

She never wearied of relating to her acquaintances how near Walter had been to succeeding to the title, and how much surprise was caused in everybody by the reappearance of an intervening heir who had been looked upon as dead. She had cherished the grievance so long as to have lost all shame in producing it. In fact she was quite unconscious of any. The recollection of its first occurrence took her back to the days of her youth when she was a beauty, and everybody, as she said, admired and loved her. Her animation on this theme was unfailing, and brought into piquant relief her conviction that Walter's luck in winning her had been something quite out of the common. It was plain that all her subsequent misfortunes were ascribed by her to the romantic folly which had allowed her to throw herself away. People said now that she "bore up wonderfully," and many admired her still more on finding that her husband had just escaped being a baronet. This discovery caused her to be made so much of, so praised and consoled with, that Mary, as she constantly remarked, felt as if the palmy days in Marleyford had come back again. In a very short time she was so thoroughly consoled that it needed something which upset her temper (a not infrequent event) to recall her to a poignant sense of her bereavement.

All this was more than Winifred in her present mood could patiently bear; and at last, one day, if only to give a new direction to her thoughts, she set out on her quest for Martha. That she had left her old lodgings she knew already, and the best chance of finding out her new address lay with the police. In Paris all people who do not take a false name can be hunted up in that manner. But Winifred's road to the Prefecture carried her through the quarter and past the very house where she herself had once lived. How many familiar memories, sad and humorous, tender and pleasant, crowded on her mind as she threaded the streets, and paused at last in front of the well-known portal! Here were changes which struck her at a glance. The concierge, for one, was not the same. Nevertheless, on enquiry she learnt that the greater number of the former tenants had returned after the siege. Some had never gone away; and among these was Claire, the little fleuriste. A great desire to see that kindly soul seized Winifred, and she ran up stairs. Reaching the cinquième at last, she knocked at the remembered door, and went in. Claire, at work upon a convolvulus spray, turned her head over her shoulders to inspect the visitor: then gave a cry of delighted surprise and sprang to her feet.

"Tiens! c'est mademoiselle! what joy! what a pleasure! Grand-père" (screaming into the ear of the blind and now deaf old man slumbering unconsciously by the window), "grandpère, it is our bonne demoiselle du premier come back to us. But not to stay? Alas! no, not to stay, of course. Those happy days were over. How many pleasant things belonged to the past now! But would not mademoiselle sit down? Grandpère would resume his seat also, for he was growing very old, and had suffered much in these latter months. Who had not suffered, however? Mademoiselle had thought of all her old friends? Was there ever such a pleasure as to see her again?"

Claire's delight was genuine, and touched grateful Winifred profoundly. It is enchanting to be welcomed with such warmth even by a humble flower-maker on a fifth floor back! Besides which, Claire was a dear little thing altogether, so neat and deft, quick-witted and kind-hearted: the best type of the hard-working Parisienne. She began pouring out all the news of the quarter, mixed with many sorrowful exclamations at the events of the past months, the horrors and sufferings of the protracted siege. The poor young medical student was dead: shot down in the trenches: the only son of the watchmaker opposite was crippled for life—and so on. That reminded Claire (in whom one person and thing always recalled another person and thing) that the other day she had met the poor little lady who did copies in the Louvre, and to whom Winifred, she knew, had always been kind —

"But where is she now?" interrupted Winifred eagerly, cutting short the torrent of remarks.

"On the Boulevard Montmartre, mademoiselle. She was creeping along painfully, looking the ghost of her shadowy self. She said she had been very ill."

"Do you know her address?" asked Winifred.

Claire did know it; but it was a street Winifred had never heard of, and would not be able easily to find. Consequently the flower-maker offered to accompany her, and she prepared to start at once. The object of her expedition was shouted into grandpère's best ear, and it was to be presumed that a portion of the information reached him. For he shuffled laboriously to his feet to "saluer" Winifred, and promised to sit quite quiet and abstain from burning holes in his coat with the ashes of his pipe until his granddaughter came back again.

The two girls then started off, the fleuriste chattering like a magpie. She had a brother some years younger than herself, who was the light of her eyes. He had been a drummer in the National Guard during the siege, and she had much, very much, to recount of his escapes and his coolness. Winifred listened sympathetically, just because genuine feeling always interested her, and not because she guessed (as how should she?) that she was to hear of the drummer-boy again.

They reached the Rue de l'Ecureuil Noir, and here Claire took her leave, after pointing out a tall narrow house, and informing her companion that Martha Freake lived at the very top of it. Enquiries of the concierge elicited that the "Anglaise" was at home; she did not often go out now, the man added, for indeed she could hardly drag one foot after another. Winifred mounted the endless stairs and, for all her youth and strength, was breathless when she reached the last. It was a shabby, almost squalid house, and the people she saw about looked haggard and careworn.

On knocking at the door to which she had been directed, no answer reached her ear. A second attempt being equally fruitless, she gently turned the handle and entered.

The room was neat; but small, bare and poverty-stricken. In an old arm-chair by the window sat Martha, so wan, so aged and wasted, that Winifred at the first glance doubted if it were she. Probably she had replied to the knock, for she was leaning forward with her eyes fixed on the door, but her voice at a little distance was no longer audible. At the apparition of Winifred a great delight swept over her face, and an inarticulate exclamation of exceeding joy broke from her lips. The girl hurried forward with outstretched arms, and Martha, mute and trembling, fell into her protecting embrace. She was so weak that any sudden emotion made her shake from head to foot, and it was some time before Winifred's caressing touch and voice could restore her to composure.

Nevertheless, there was a change in her, which her young visitor with the insight of sympathy was quick to note. Physically she was worn and consumed to such a degree that to look at her was to

wonder how she yet lived. But mentally she was marvellously improved. The cloud that had formerly obscured her intelligence in her quiet moments seemed to have lifted, and the restlessness which generally alternated with it was gone. Later, Winifred learnt that during the siege, as long as her health lasted, she had been untiring in her ministrations to her poor and suffering neighbours; and it seemed as if the contact with grim misery, and the echo in her mind of terribly real events, had overborne and stilled her own anguish of soul.

Presently they began to talk: and, reticent as Martha showed herself, she could not entirely prevent Winifred from guessing the truth.

"Surely—forgive my saying it!—you needn't live here," exclaimed the latter, with a discontented glance round the sparingly-furnished room.

"I have not earned anything for months," was the answer, given, however, with some hesitation.

Winifred, aware that the "earnings," had always been pathetically small, was not much enlightened; but she could not press the point. After many weeks she came to know, indirectly, that Martha had parted with a portion of her microscopic income to relieve a need which she believed to be greater than her own. For herself, she could afford to take no heed for the future, she thought, as the space of time in front of her must be brief. Something of this she conveyed, in replying to an observation of Winifred's regarding the absence of a stove.

"This is spring," said Martha.

"But spring does not last," returned her companion, impatiently; "nor summer either."

"The mild weather will last as long as I shall."

Winifred put her arm round the wasted frame. "Do you know why I have come back to Paris? To take you to live with me."

The colour rose faintly into Martha's pallid cheeks. "What claim have I on you, child?" she asked tenderly, gratefully, yet a little proudly too.

"The claim that—those by whose wealth I have benefited worked you a wrong which they are too blind or too indifferent to expiate." And Winifred related all she knew.

Martha listened startled; at first almost a little scared. The cruel story which had dwelt dumbly and darkly in her memory so long, when put into words again awoke something of its past terror and vividness of anguish. But little by little, Winifred's earnest and generous pity first quieted, then touched her. After years of lonely pain, her heart unclosed itself once more to the voice of human sympathy. She wept; she whose grief for long had known only the torture of dry-eyed sobs; and the rain of sorrow fell with bountiful refreshment on her seared and blighted heart.

Winifred petted her as she might have done a child, only more

tenderly, for with her compassion mingled something of awe. She felt that in this newly-stirred spirit there were depths of suffering that she could never sound. It was characteristic of Martha that she asked few questions. In her simple-minded nature, vindictiveness held no place, and she was above the paltry satisfaction that details might have afforded her. They talked of their plans, for she made no further objection to living with Winifred. Only she was the first to suggest that Mary might be an obstacle.

"No," said Winifred decidedly, shaking her head. "She will not want me, I am sure. She has already said she will go back to Provence to her friends there, unless the Russells invite her—an event on which I know that she counts. I shall tell her that in future my home is to be yours."

"You can add that it will not be for long," Martha added quietly; so quietly that Winifred glanced at her, for a moment uncertain what she meant. But the serene and sad "far away" look in her eyes was explanation enough: Martha meant that she was dying. Winifred took one of the transparent hands and kissed it softly for all reply; then, promising to return ere many days were over, she went away.

The following week, the date of the funeral being at last fixed, Sir Charles Russell arrived. He was followed by Mark and Dorothy. The news of the delay in the final rites—a concession obtained from the authorities with extreme difficulty; for in France, according to law, burial must take place within forty-eight hours after death—had deferred their projected departure from The Limes, and Dolly had been consuming her innermost heart with impatience.

"It was dreadful," she confided to Winifred. "Miss Dallas, now that she is to be Lady Hatherley, is simply insupportable. And my uncle alternates between sulks and fidgets. Mark has behaved like an angel, although rather a low-spirited one. Mamma is in a dumb fury, and Flossy is just one overflowing urn of tears. Uncle John made no objection to my leaving him or to earning my own livelihood. In fact he praised my spirit. It is the first time he has ever praised anything in me, and Flossie was quite hurt at it. But I told her that if she would invest in a broom and sweep the Elmsleigh crossings, he would probably discover that she had always been his favourite niece. I can assure you, Winifred, he grows more of a miser every day. Yet he heaps presents upon his bride-elect: and intends to have a magnificent wedding."

"Dolly speaks very confidently of earning her own livelihood; but I do not quite see how it is to be done," said Winifred to Mark, a few hours later. They had met with a good deal of constraint; and were now talking perseveringly on subjects quite unconnected with each other.

"I cannot consider that our responsibilities towards her cease because she chooses to live away from us," observed Mark. "My

father, for some reason which I do not attempt to fathom, seems inclined to let her work out the experiment. But I have told her that she is to apply to me in her first difficulty, and I trust to you to see that she does so."

"I daresay she will succeed much better than you think."

"You have yourself, Winifred, just hinted that you consider her success doubtful."

Winifred bit her lip. She had indeed, within two minutes, said two things that sounded completely contradictory: How explain that her latest remark had been wrung from her by secret irritation at the measured speech and judicial air of Mark?

"I think what I meant was that the methods of success do not seem very clear, but that, all the same, Dolly's own courage is a very hopeful factor."

"I think what you meant was that rebellion for its own sake is a good thing to cultivate," retorted he.

"But surely you cannot deny that Dolly is right in wishing to be independent?"

Mark made no answer. He was out of humour with independence in women; although, possibly, if *one* woman had submitted to him, he would have applauded an enterprising disposition in the rest of the sex. There was a silence so long that it became embarrassing, and, at last, Mark himself was the first to break it.

"May I ask what are your own plans?"

"They are quite unaltered since I left Elmsleigh," answered Winifred quietly.

"Nevertheless, I have as yet seen no trace of the lady whom it pleases you to consider my father's victim."

"She is coming to live with me: as soon as my aunt has decided upon her own movements."

Mark rose and took a turn about the room. He looked very stern, and muttered something in which the word "folly" was alone audible. Winifred went to him; and, impulsively, without thinking what she did, laid her hand upon his arm.

"Why do you judge me harshly only because I try to do my duty?" she said gently.

He looked at her with eyes of reluctant passion, crushing her hand, at the same time, within his grasp until he hurt her.

"Duty? It is Quixotism."

"No. I am so far a member of your family, that I have profited by your father's bounty. And the chance that has led me to discover the injustice, of which, as I believe, Martha Freake was and is the victim, seems to me a kind of injunction to take upon myself the expiation which all of you reject."

"Nonsense, Winifred! If you were rich——"

"I am rich enough for that—and for her. Poor thing! She needs so little. If you could see her, I think you would be sorry for her."

"I am willing enough to help her," said Mark quickly. "Whatever she may have been in the past, I should say, from all I have heard, that now she is a fit object for charity."

"But not for pity?" Winifred raised her eyes with a quiet smile.

He looked more and more annoyed. "For pity, if you will, always supposing that you mean by that a mere instinct of humanity. But certainly not for pity in your sense of exaggerated devotion and reckless severance of yourself from all old and natural ties."

Winifred sighed. It was very hard to know that Mark condemned her, and yet after her last interview with Martha, how was it possible that she should draw back? Her eyes filled with sudden tears as she recalled the wasted figure, the shabby room, the uncomplaining poverty and gentle endurance—all, in fact, that made up her latest recollection of Sir John's injured cousin. "You do not understand," she said, trying hard to steady her voice, and to suppress all signs of emotion. "You seem to think that I have taken up her cause out of mere perversity, and that I am squandering my compassion —"

"You have expressed my innermost idea—you are 'squandering your compassion.'" Mark was nettled at a faint smile which curled Winifred's lips, and of which he could not read the meaning. So he went on hotly—"I do not wish her to die of want, or to be in need of anything. If she be poor and ill —"

"She is very, very poor; and more than ill; she is dying."

"Then in heaven's name let everything possible be done for her. Send her money, food, medicines—a doctor —"

"And do you suppose she would accept all this —" broke in Winifred, with kindling eyes of such honest indignation that Mark looked at her in surprise. But he was determined to stick to his own point of view. It was that Martha might be a lunatic rather than a criminal, but could never have been a victim.

"If people cannot help themselves, they must consent to be helped," he resumed.

"I understand," answered Winifred, bitterly. "You would give her everything except two things, which she most needs and has least received—belief, and the pity that springs not from duty, but from love. Yes! Feed her, clothe her, tend her while her poor, joyless, wasted life still clings to her suffering body. Do all this for her, and hug yourself with a proud consciousness of having performed your duty. But deny her that for which she has thirsted and hungered through tragic days and sleepless nights—the tender compassion which would prove to her that she is not a pariah and an outcast. Keep her alive in the flesh, and let her die morally inch by inch. And when you have prolonged her days—with the help of your money, which is much, and your charity, which is boundless, let her close her eyes on the world with the knowledge that you have never once ceased to suspect, to despise, and condemn her."

"Winifred!"

The girl had poured out her protest in such a fiery heat of generous wrath ; her low vibrating tones had lent such power, and the force of impassioned conviction in her such dignity, to her words, that Mark was simply electrified. Anger, doubt, wounded family-pride and mortified self-love were all swallowed up in sheer amazement. After his one exclamation, he could simply stand and gaze at her. For a moment or two she looked back at him, still thrilling from head to foot with agitation, and too lifted out of herself for personal consciousness. But, little by little, his glance overpowered her ; she underwent a swift reaction of regret, not for what she had expressed, but for having expressed it to *him* ; love made her fear that she might have offended him ; and—too proud to ask for pardon, too true to retract, she turned a little away from him, and buried her face in her hands.

The movement, so humble and graceful, touched Mark profoundly. From his proud Winifred, it almost amounted to an act of surrender. At least, he thought so, and like a true man, thought also that the moment had come to bend her to his will.

He went up to her, and, before she guessed his intention, put his arm round her waist. She started and tried to free herself : then stood perfectly still.

"Winifred—for my sake, give up this folly and come back to England—back to me."

His voice was low and full of pleading ; but she made no answer. Only shook her head. He took her two hands in one of his, and drew them down from her face, plunging his glance into hers. "Winifred !" He was determined to conquer her, and resolute himself not to yield an inch.

"Why do you ask it ?" she cried, and broke away from him. "It is cruel, useless. The poor thing is dying. Everything I can do for her will only last a few months : perhaps weeks."

Mark frowned. He did not like being crossed, and Winifred was crossing him. He wanted to hear her say that she would give up everything for him—for *him* : and here was she holding out for the gratification of a mere whim.

"You count it as nothing, then, the injurious doubts which your conduct, by implication, throws on my family ?" This was decidedly a weak argument for a lover, and a personal one would have done better ; but Mark was a little angry, and his pride was desperately afraid of a fresh rebuff.

"I cannot help my convictions," replied Winifred, humbly, casting at him an imploring glance that said "Forgive me" as plainly as a look could speak. And as his brow still remained very dark, she ventured to approach him again, and added very sweetly : "Lend me to Martha for a little while, Mark. She will not trouble either of us long."

He looked down, in reality more exasperated than moved to compliance, yet so far vanquished that he could find no persuasive reply.

She made him feel churlish—even a little childish, and he did not like that.

"As you please," he said at last, reluctantly. "But the burden you have taken on yourself is too great for you alone. Will you let me help you with it?"

"No," returned Winifred, decidedly, and shook her golden head.

Mark flushed. "Not even so much will you concede?"

"Listen!" said the girl: and while her lips quivered a little with emotion, she laid her hands frankly in his. "For the next few months let us be nothing to one another—nothing (with a charming blush) but friends. You shall go your way, and let me go mine. I will carry my self-appointed burden alone, and expiate, unaided, my own mistakes—if I have made them. When all is over, and my task is done, perhaps you may have arrived at a better frame of mind regarding it. If not—we will never speak of it, and the experience of this part of my life will belong to me alone."

"Of course, if you need me so little, I have nothing more to say," answered Mark; and quite abruptly, standing away from her, he began to talk of indifferent things.

Winifred was extremely surprised; sooth to say, secretly mortified and disappointed. The ways of men being quite unknown to her guilelessness, she jumped to the conclusion that she had offended Mark, and felt desperately and humiliatingly inclined to beg his pardon. On the other hand, she was shy about it; was sure he would not expect it; and, her spirits sinking to zero, she began to persuade herself that he really did not care for her. And Mark, who had anticipated, from her usual straightforwardness, that she would have met his sulky speech with an eager protest, was equally disappointed on his side, and hugely affronted to boot.

The "little rift within the lute" widened during the next few days, and they parted at last with a coldness that left an aching in the heart of both. Winifred consoled herself as well as she could by overwhelming Martha with kindness, and Mark by indignantly hugging his belief in his father.

Meanwhile, Mary, quietly informed by Winifred of her discovery respecting Miss Freake, and of her consequent intentions, had flown into a violent rage. It was not that she really loved Winifred, or that she could not be as comfortable and happy away from her as with her; but she was one of those people who, the instant they are deprived of a thing begin placing an exaggerated value upon it.

She accused Winifred of ingratitude; drowned herself in angry tears; and asked the four winds of heaven who was to pack for her, write her notes, run her errands, keep her accounts, and govern her servants?

Mary Russell was strangely and shamefully unaffected by Winifred's discovery of her past baseness towards Martha; she became furious on being told that her victim was poor, suffering, and had not many

months to live; while at the same time, almost in the same breath, she talked of going to see Martha and "having it out about John." She heaped, indeed, plenty of abuse on her brother; but was speechless with indignation at Winifred's view that she could no longer continue to profit by his bounty. Her friends in Provence, being French, were naturally disinclined to approve of Winifred's conduct; and invited the, as they supposed, lonely and disconsolate widow to return to Provence and spend some more time with them; and Mary was not slow to perceive that, under such circumstances, separation from Winifred might have its advantages.

So she finally took her departure; and Winifred, giving up the apartment, moved into a small and pretty little one au quatrième which she had selected for herself. Thither she in a few days transported Martha. There she installed her studio, and settled down to work. Dolly, of course, had joined her, and was as eager as herself to begin earning money. Winifred hunted up as many members as she could find of her former artistic connection; sold two small pictures at low prices to a dealer, and managed to get Dolly one or two orders for painting plates and fans. But these brought in such small earnings, and Dolly's round face was wont to lengthen so piteously whenever she talked over her prospects, that Winifred finally suggested her teaching English. She seized upon the idea with avidity, having a mortal fear of failing in her enterprise and of being forced to return to Elmsleigh. In Paris, at any rate, she was free, she was near Richard, and she amused herself. Winifred was exquisitely kind to her in a half elder-sisterly, wholly charming way that made an agreeable contrast to the family jars that diversified relations with Mrs. Hatherley and Florence.

So everybody was pressed into the service of Dorothy's career.

Richard was set to work to beat up recruits, Winifred talked about her perpetually to her fellow artists; Dolly herself, with a firm conviction of merit that went a very long way, left nobody any peace on the subject of her wishes; and the result of all this was that the pupils shortly presented themselves. They were not very numerous and did not pay very well at first; everything in Paris being at so low an ebb. But they were "a foundation," as Dolly said of them collectively. She set to work upon them with the greatest energy, and having a bright manner, a fluent tongue, a fund of quiet assurance, and the prettiest face possible, she had the luck to become popular. Moreover, she was une créole: magic words: what of romance, and charm and sleepy grace do they not suggest to the Parisian? Nothing for Dolly's present purposes could have turned out better than the fact of her having been born in Jamaica. She was overwhelmed with attentions; Winifred got some orders through her; Martha revived a little; and everything in the tiny household went merrily as a marriage-bell.

(To be continued.)

IN THAT ROOM.

"I SHALL have to put you in that room, after all, Jenny. I had intended the east chamber for you, and it was made up yesterday; but last night Mrs. Deane came unexpectedly with her baby, and we had to give it to her, as it was the only one ready. I did not like to put her out of it this morning, and into the Red Room."

"No, of course not. I'm sure I would as soon be in one room as another."

"Mary Ann shall sleep on the sofa in the room, so you won't mind; you'll not feel lonely, dear."

"In wonder's sake, Martha, what do you think I want with Mary Ann in my room?"

Mrs. Carrick paused: "I thought you might get nervous at the prospect of sleeping in it alone. It is away from the rest of the house, so to say; up these other stairs."

"Nervous!" exclaimed Jenny; "why, I should never think of such a thing. What is there to get nervous about? You have not a burglar epidemic abroad just now, have you?—or a ghost that walks the room?"

"N—o, not exactly. Burglars! oh dear no. I've not heard of any in this neighbourhood."

At this reply, Miss Malcolm turned suddenly from the contemplation of her pretty new grey travelling suit in the large cheval glass—for they had now reached the Red Room, and confronted her cousin with an enquiring look.

"Martha Carrick, it *is* a ghost. And you meant to smuggle me into his den without proper warning or introduction!"

"You ridiculous girl! There's no ghost about it. Only a story connected with the room."

"What story is it?"

"You—you——" Mrs. Carrick flushed as she recognised her mistake, and came to a standstill. "Jenny, I thought you knew all about it; I did, indeed."

"Only a story, after all! What a disappointment! A real, veritable ghost would have been a new experience in these enlightened days; delightfully sensational. As to any story connected with your Red Room, I have never heard of it."

"You have heard of our Red Room, Jenny?"

"I've heard of your Red Room, and believe you and Frank think so much of it that you always spell it with a capital letter. It is a very nice room, Martha," added the young lady, turning herself about in it.

This room was situated in the north-west corner of Frank Carrick's old-fashioned house ; a very, very old red-brick house, in an old suburb of the capital. The room filled up a gable-end, and was not near any other room, being approached by a separate staircase, and then by a long passage. Seen in the afternoon sunshine, it looked, though of good size, the cosiest chamber in the world, with its red carpet and curtains, its grand old furniture, and the pretty look-out upon the bright garden underneath, and to the green hills of Middlesex in the distance.

"It is a perfectly charming room !" exclaimed the young visitor. "And now, Martha, what's the story ?"

"Oh, my dear, never mind the story ; I don't think it's one you would be interested in. And you must make haste down, for I'm sure tea is in, and Mrs. Deane was wishing for it."

She ran away as she spoke ; she was not much more than a girl herself. And Miss Malcolm, charmed with the change from her own little country home in the monotonous seaside village called Nalem, put herself to rights, and forgot all about "the story."

But when night came, and Mrs. Carrick again accompanied her young guest through the worm-eaten staircase and narrow passages to the same isolated spot, the room seemed to have lost its cheerful aspect. By the light of the two wax candles standing on the dressing-table, the red carpet and draperies took a sombre depth and shade that was by no means enlivening ; at least, such was the opinion of the hostess herself. Jenny was chattering away as usual, and seemed to be entirely unobservant of the change which night had wrought in her surroundings.

"It does look lonely here at night," at last broke out Mrs. Carrick. "I do think, Jenny, you should let Mary Ann sleep on that sofa in the recess."

Jane Malcolm gazed with real and not affected astonishment at her cousin. "Martha, what can be the matter with you ? Have you grown nervous since you married ?—perhaps living in this old-world dwelling, that I suppose must be a relic of the Ancient Britons, has made you so ?"

"No, no, Jenny ; I only thought you might be nervous."

"I nervous !" echoed Jenny. "Feel that arm, cousin mine," and, with a gay smile, she threw back the open sleeve and held out the round white arm, its smooth firmness betraying the best of health. "Aunt Deborah is fond of telling me I am so sound and well, Martha, as to smack of plebeianism : if I *have* any nerves, which I doubt, they are out of sight and out of mind."

"I am glad to hear it, my dear. Mary Ann ——"

"*Glad to hear it !* Why, what else did you expect to hear ? You must be out of order yourself, Patty. And now let us say good night, and you go to your own bed and to sleep, and don't worry me any more about Mary Ann."

Mrs. Carrick, thus adjured, takes a final survey of the room, sees that the window is safely bolted, and bids her guest good night. Her husband was already in his room.

"Hope you've been long enough, Patty!"

"Well, I did stay a little while; the room seemed so lonely. As I stood in it, Frank, I felt glad that I had not told her the ghost story."

"I should think you'd never be foolish enough to repeat to her such rubbish as that," reproved Mr. Frank Carrick.

"It would not disturb Jane if I did; be sure of that, Frank. I never saw such a happy girl. You deem it strange I should think so much of these odd stories; whereas I feel it is strange she should care so little for them. I would wager that beautiful diamond ring you've just given me that if a ghost appeared to her she would only laugh at it."

"Sensible girl!" said Mr. Carrick. "I say, Patty, she's uncommonly pretty. Such a particularly nice face."

Jane, meanwhile, was preparing for rest. The last thing, when her prayers were said, committing herself to the good care of God, for the girl was honestly devout, and the candles were put out, she drew the window-curtains open, and looked out. It was a beautiful moonlit night. The wide, solitary landscape lay bathed in light. Not a sound was to be heard, not a movement to be seen, telling of life's busy action. This old house of Mr. Carrick's, called *The Gables*, was in a lonely part of the old western suburb, no other dwellings were very near it. A dark wall, overgrown with ivy, and high enough to keep out a besieging army, encased its grounds all round. On the brightest of days the place had somehow a solitary look; which, perhaps, was the reason that it got the reputation of being haunted.

"A peaceful scene," thought Jane, "and really quieter than Nalem: there we do see the men straggling home from the public-house, and the fishing-boats putting out to sea. What a goose Patty must be getting to suppose I should not like to sleep alone!"

At the breakfast table the next morning Miss Malcolm appeared with the brightest of faces. She had slept soundly.

"Well, Martha," she said laughingly, when salutations had passed, "your ghost was not polite enough to pay me a visit; but I had the queerest dream."

"I hope it was a pleasant one," said Martha. "You know what omen is drawn from the first dream under a strange roof."

"That it will come true," laughed Jane again. "Well, I don't think my dream is likely to come true."

"You've no objection to telling it, have you?" asked Mr. Carrick, echoing her laugh.

"Oh, not in the least," said the girl. "I went to sleep almost as soon as my head touched the pillow, and it was in this first sleep that I met your ancestor, Colonel Carrick. You know we had been speaking of him during the evening, Martha, and I had admired his portrait, and told you that if I was to be visited by any ghost I should

prefer the handsome royalist. Well, I dreamed that I was at a great party in this very house, only the furniture was all of it quite old-fashioned, and instead of your big windows, there were ever so many smaller ones, and so high from the floor they looked like prison windows to me ——”

“Why, I declare, that was the very appearance the house presented before you altered it, Mr. Carrick!” interrupted Mrs. Deane. “I dare say Miss Malcolm has heard it described, or perhaps saw it before the alterations.”

“Neither the one nor the other,” replied Jenny. “I did not know the house *had* been altered.”

“A few of the rooms have been modernised a little,” said Mrs. Deane, who was an old friend of the Carrick family. “I wonder you should dream of them as they used to be!”

“Well, I did,” said Jenny.

“I see, I see; you are bound to put it all to the Red Room account,” Mr. Carrick cried, gaily. “You and my wife were gossiping over it, you know.”

Jenny looked at him with a rather puzzled face, but Mrs. Carrick interposed quickly. “Come, do go on with your dream, Jenny. There’s nothing I like so much to hear about as people’s dreams.”

And Jenny went on. “When I came into the room where all this gala company was, the first person I saw distinctly was a tall, handsome man, in a grand uniform just like that in the picture of Colonel Carrick, and the face of this gentleman was precisely like the face in the portrait. He came forward to meet me as I entered, and as he stood before me a moment, what *do* you think he said?” And here, pausing, Jenny laughs and blushes a little.

“We give it up; none of this family are good at conundrums, Miss Jane,” Frank Carrick remarks; and so with another little laugh, she goes on.

“He said, in so low a tone that I understood at once nobody but myself was expected to hear it: ‘Miss Malcolm, my nephew has arrived, and is impatient to meet his promised wife.’ The next moment he turned about, and a young man, not at all like the Colonel, and dressed in the fashion of to-day, stood before me. He put out his hand to take mine, and as he did so I started back in a sort of fright, whereupon the old Colonel bent down and whispered in my ear, ‘It is of no use for you to resist, my dear; it is your fate.’”

Here Jenny pauses. Nobody interrupts her.

“This,” she continues, “only frightened me the more, and I turned and ran out of the room. The Colonel ran after me, not at all angrily, but laughing immoderately. But I was too swift for him. I ran upstairs straight to the Red Room (my room, you know, that I am now actually sleeping in), and banged the door in his face. Then I awoke, and I was really laughing myself.”

“That’s not much of a dream,” said Mrs. Deane disparagingly.

"But it's not all," said Jane. "After lying awake a few minutes I fell fast asleep again, and I took up my dream just where it had left off, for I heard the sound of the Colonel's laughter and footsteps growing fainter and fainter as he went down stairs. I had escaped the Colonel, but there before me stood an old, old lady with a white satin dress over her arm. 'It's of no use for you to resist,' she said, repeating the Colonel's words and wagging her head wickedly at me, 'it's your fate; for this prank of yours you will be married to-night, young lady.' Do what I would, I couldn't escape from her; and she put on me the white satin dress. It seemed to be upon me very quickly, and then as she opened the door and seized my wrist to lead me down, I sprang away; but my foot caught in my grand gown, and I felt myself falling in that frightful way one does fall in dreams. And here, while I was falling, I again awoke."

"And was that the ending?" cried Martha.

"No. I lay awake a goodish while this time, speculating about my odd dream, and especially the odd manner in which the same dream had returned to me. And during this speculation I fell asleep a third time, and *again the same thread* was resumed. This time I was lying in a great canopied bed in that very Red Room, and the old lady and the Colonel were standing before me looking as solemn as judges. The old lady came close up to the bed, and leaning over me, said, in a shrill little voice: 'You won't escape us again, miss, I can tell you; never again. That ancestress of yours served this family a nice trick in her day, and got us well scandalised by her folly.' Then that handsome Colonel laughed, and said to me, in the politest way: 'And you, my dear, are going to atone for all that. You'll unite'—and snap here went the thread of the dream again, and I awoke. I suppose it was that horrid little black-and-tan terrier of yours, Martha, yapping under my window, that disturbed me this time. I went to sleep again, but I didn't dream again; which was a disappointment, you'll allow. I did so want to hear what the Colonel was going to say," she added laughingly.

"The fact of it is, you were disappointed at not meeting that nephew again, Miss Jenny," said Frank, jocosely.

"Of course I was," retorted Jenny in the same strain. "But was it not a very odd dream—taking in the fact of my resuming it twice after waking?"

"Well, yes, it was rather odd," he admitted. "But the fact of resuming a dream is not very uncommon."

"No, I don't know that it is," returned Jenny, feeling somehow by Mr. Carrick's words and manner as if she had been telling a very foolish and uninteresting story. Martha, too, looked dull and dis-trait, and that little Mrs. Deane had a queer, constrained expression as if she were laughing at her. Abashed by these indications, Jenny withdrew into herself, and became silent. And the days went on, and nothing more was said.

It was the time of the May meetings, of the picture galleries, of gay parties, of lectures, of theatres, and of other busy things, sacred and profane; so it seemed to Jane Malcolm that she had not a minute in the day to call her own. The sun was hot, the streets were thronged; and Jane, either on foot or in the Carricks' modest little carriage, made her way amid stifling heat and dust to one place and another. The theological May controversies and the social science lectures greatly won her favour, and especially the musical réunions that, to ordinary ears, had in them not one bit of melody.

"How you *can* stand so much dulness, Jenny; the theology and the philosophy and the scrapings; puzzles me," exclaimed Mrs. Frank Carrick one morning when Jenny came down equipped for another expedition. "How you can listen to it all, I can't imagine; let alone comprehend it."

"Comprehend it! Why, bless me, Martha, I don't pretend to comprehend the half of it."

"What on earth do you go for, then?"

"Oh, to see the people, and for the sake of going out somewhere, and I do like the hard, dry things a little. Now I am up from the country it is right to make the most of my time."

"Good gracious!" cried Mrs. Martha, "when I thought and Frank thought that you were up to all the isms and the ologies! The idea of your going for nothing but to meet people, like any other girl!"

"Did you imagine I was not like any other girl, Martha?"

"Why, yes, in a way, I suppose I did. You know, Jenny, you were always above me. Compare your grand intellect with poor mine!"

Jenny laughed heartily. "Compare it with yours! My superior intellect! How is it shown, Martha?—in not being afraid of ghosts? By the way, you have never told me your ghost story yet. *What* is it?"

Martha looks queer. "Oh, it's nothing but an old fancy about the old Colonel and some friend of his appearing now and then."

"In the Red Room, I suppose," laughs Jenny, merrily. "And who's the friend?—the old lady I met in my dream?"

"What if it is? You have not met either of them since the first night, Jane."

"No, that I've not. But, Martha, I met the young man again last night, the nephew they were so anxious for me to marry."

"Now what do you mean by saying that?" demanded Mrs. Carrick.

"Well, I dreamt of him. It's the second time I've seen him, you know, and I assure you I am getting quite reconciled to the match."

She went off in a burst of merriment, for the little brougham was waiting, and Mrs. Deane was waiting also. They were going together alone, to an afternoon concert.

In the midst of the entertainment, which was hot and crowded,

a lady sitting just behind them was taken with faintness. Miss Malcolm turned round to offer her fan, when she saw a gentleman, standing at the side, suddenly turn his gaze upon her. Jenny's nerves were well sheathed, as she had said, but a very queer sensation thrilled her from head to foot. *The face of this stranger was the face she had twice seen in her dreams*; the face of the man whom the old Colonel had called his nephew!

The fainting lady had to be taken out; and in the bustle this occasioned, the stranger moved forward, so that he was more than on a level with Jenny. She directed Mrs. Deane's attention to him.

"Do you know that gentleman?" she whispered.

"Which gentleman? *That* young man? Never saw him before, my dear. He is looking at you."

Taking a safe opportunity, Jenny presently looked at him. Yes, there were the same marked lineaments she so well remembered; the high, well-formed nose, the searching eyes and peculiarly drooping eyelids, the straight, dark brows, the clean-shaved, firm chin. On the upper lip was a slight, dark moustache. He was tall, and well-made; altogether a well and rather distinguished-looking man.

How the concert progressed after that, Jane Malcolm never knew. The fiddles scraped and the voices quavered, but she heard none of it. She was only conscious that ever and anon that stranger face was turned upon her with a gaze of curious intentness. When all was over, various acquaintances of Mrs. Deane's approached them, and Jenny had to laugh and talk; but she was fully conscious that her unknown, mysterious neighbour was hovering near to keep her in view. Only in the crowded progress to the door did she lose sight of him. The last glimpse she had of him, he was linking his arm with that of another gentleman, to whom he began to talk.

"Anyway, he must be flesh and blood, and not a phantom; there's satisfaction in that," quoth Jenny to herself. "It seems unaccountably odd, though."

They got home in time for afternoon tea. Mrs. Deane swallowed a cup standing, and then ran up stairs to her baby and nurse. And over their own tea, Jenny told her cousin the strange story of the afternoon.

Mrs. Martha, listening to it, looked as if all the ghosts of the Carricks' ancestral mansion had suddenly appeared before her. "Who would have thought, Jenny, that such a little, matter-of-fact, practical person as you would have been the heroine of so uncannily a mystery!"

Jenny laughed. "Martha, you treat this little sequel to my dream with more respect than you did the dream itself."

Martha coloured; glancing at Jenny in a quick, observant way.

"And I don't know that I wonder at it," went on Jenny. "Of course, this queer fact of meeting my dream-gentleman in broad daylight, makes the chief interest in the whole matter."

"Are you *sure* the young man you saw was the same that appeared to you in your dream?"

"Sure and certain, Martha. In my *two* dreams, please remember. His face made a clear impression upon my memory in the first dream; but it was nothing like the exactness with which every feature, and its every expression, fixed itself like a photograph in my mind in the dream of last night."

"I never heard anything like the affair altogether; never," ejaculated Mrs. Carrick, with emphasis.

"I have," quietly returned Jenny. "Nothing of the kind ever came under my own observation or experience before, but I've read and heard of such things. We are Scotch people, you know, on my mother's side, and I have heard Grandmamma Mackay tell a great many of those old, second-sight, Scotch stories, and especially about such dreams as mine. A great many of them, I believe, are purely imaginary, helped on by some old tradition; but now and then something like this experience of mine does happen, I take it."

"Your father was Scotch, too, Jenny."

"No, only in name. Originally I suppose he was."

"I wonder what Frank will say to *this*!" cried Mrs. Carrick, in a sort of triumph. "He is a wretched unbeliever in general."

"I shan't tell him. You can, if you please."

"Of course I shall;" and that very night she kept her word.

Frank laughed, as was his wont. And what he said was not at all complimentary to his wife or to Jenny. In fact, he doubted the whole story; believed that Jenny had become so impressed with that dream-gentleman that she endowed the first fine-looking fellow she saw with his lineaments; and mocked at Martha for a goose.

"That shows how much you know of Jane Malcolm," retorted she. "She's about as fanciful as you are, Frank, and no more so."

"I don't think Jenny is very fanciful myself, Martha; but girls will be girls," declared Mr. Carrick, with the air of summing the matter up.

"And stupid men *will* be stupid men," retorted Mrs. Carrick, making a grimace at her lord and master.

This ended it for the present. But, what with one thing and another, Mrs. Martha felt intensely aggravated.

The May meetings were over; and in three days more Jane's visit would come to an end. A festive evening gathering was about to be held at The Gables: Frank and his wife had been too busy to think of it before.

On the night of the festivities, Martha, herself dressed, went to the Red Room to see for her cousin. Jenny was standing before the glass, settling some pink rose-buds in the body of her dress. It was of white tarletan, the skirt looped up with roses and rose-buds.

"Oh, Jenny," she exclaimed impulsively, "you look lovely!"

"I may *look* lovely; but I don't feel so just now," returned the girl, a curious seriousness running through her light tone.

"And why not, pray?—Stay, this wants a pin here."

"Martha, you will think me cracked, I dare say; but, as true as I'm standing here, I am wearing the exact dress—this white robe and these pink roses—that I wore when I found myself standing before the old Colonel in my dream. I remembered it as you came into the room; it flashed upon me with a sort of shock."

"Goodness gracious!" exclaimed Martha, dropping a whole paper of pins in her trepidation.

"You know I told you at the time that the nephew's dress was of the fashion of to-day, but I never remembered my own dress until this moment. This is what you call a *latent memory*, I suppose;" and Jenny laughed a little. "It is the identical dress the old lady took off to attire me in the satin."

"Oh, my goodness!" again breathed Mrs. Martha, as she picked up her pins, "what a dreadful thing, Jenny! I believe it all comes of this room; and—but there's the bell and the first carriage, and I must run."

She whisked out of the room as if she were fleeing from a small army of ghosts. Jenny looked after her in surprise, for she saw that her terror was real. And, for a moment, as she stood there alone, and heard the wind sweeping through the long passages, and shaking the old door-latches, an undefined feeling came over her, not of fear, but of something unusual, either in the atmosphere about her, or in her own state of mind. "It *can't* be this Red Room, as Martha says," she murmured, "it must be that I am growing silly." But yet she was not sorry to see Mary Ann come back, asking whether there was anything else she could do.

Taking a last look at herself, she drew on her white gloves and went down to the drawing-rooms. And once in that gay, bright scene, seeing glimpses of her own pretty self in the long mirrors, and meeting an endless array of Carricks of one and two and three generations, and other brilliant people, she forgot all about the dreams and their troubling puzzles, and remembered only the very agreeable present, that she was looking her best, and that some flattering eyes, bent on her, were beaming with a consciousness of that fact. One of these gazers was brought up to her and introduced as Tom Carrick, and they were both in the full swing of that remarkable nonsense young people delight in, when some stir in the room close by, and their host's voice raised in surprise, caused them to look round.

"What *you*, Henry! What does this mean?"

"It means that I am back," answered a pleasant voice: and Jenny felt ready to faint, for the speaker was the young man she had three times seen—twice in her dreams, once at the concert. "In fact, I've been back a week or two, Frank, but most of that time has had to be spent in the country."

"Don't be alarmed, Miss Malcolm; it's only another Carrick," cried her companion, perceiving her strange look. "This one is Henry; he has been absent for two or three years."

Jane Malcolm was watching the new-comer, listening to Martha's cordial reception of him, and holding her breath in a sort of eager restraint, till she should be brought face to face with him, hardly knowing, as it seemed to her dazed mind, whether he was real or unreal.

"Where has he been?" she asked mechanically.

"Oh, all about the Continent. Stayed chiefly in Paris, I fancy. Miss Malcolm, what *is* it? You look as if you had seen a ghost."

"Perhaps I have," she answered, in the same tone. And shortly she knew that Frank was standing before her, introducing to her his relative (a distant one), Mr. Henry Carrick. Raising her eyes, almost reluctantly, she met the same intent gaze she had received a few days ago. He bent forward a little, and said, in the quietest way: "I believe I saw you at St. James's Hall?"

"Yes," she answered: and he sat down by her side, and they conversed together, the tones of each quietly confidential. Mr. Tom Carrick found himself quite de trop, and moved away.

"I say, Martha," said he, "Henry has cut me out entirely with your pretty cousin. Just look at them!"

Mrs. Martha looked disturbed. She had heard vague reports that Henry Carrick was a very agreeable man, who made himself fascinating to women without the slightest idea of marrying, and she did not choose Jenny to be trifled with. Taking a *détour* presently, she made a little effort at breaking up the prolonged *tête-à-tête*, but unsuccessfully. At this failure she beckoned to her husband.

"Break up that flirtation, Frank, and bring Jenny over to me. I want her to make acquaintance with the Dunham girls."

"Flirtation!" repeated Frank. "They are talking about the iron mines in some Russian town."

"I don't care what they are talking about; I tell you it's a flirtation, Frank, and I want you to break it up. I don't approve of any such monopolising on the part of Mr. Harry Carrick."

Frank shrugged his shoulders. He saw how it was: though like a sensible host—would that hostesses possessed the same shining virtue—he hated to break up a *tête-à-tête*. "Why can't women let each other alone?" was his inward query, but being a rather new husband he felt bound to please his wife at any cost, and so, though much against his will, went forward to do her bidding. It is very curious how a concealed motive will sometimes convey itself to the person or persons most concerned. There was certainly nothing strange in the fact that a pretty girl like Miss Malcolm should be wanted elsewhere, and Henry Carrick was sufficiently a man of society to know that he *had* rather monopolised the young lady; but, when Frank, following on his wife's previous effort, advanced with a plausible excuse for carrying off Jenny, Henry knew it was all a ruse. "So

I am warned off, am I," thought he, and smiled to himself. Jenny also saw through it—that she must not make much acquaintance with this last-known of the Carricks; and somehow she felt resentful.

That night, when the guests had departed, Martha came to the Red Room for a minute's talk. "Well, Jenny," she began, "and how did you like my favourite, Tom Carrick?"

"I liked him very well," said Jenny; "but I liked Mr. Henry Carrick better."

"Oh, yes; I dare say Harry Carrick can make himself very agreeable! He is a great flirt, Jenny; at least, people say so. Nobody thought he would ever marry; when suddenly last year he sent news home that he was engaged. Who she is, or what she is, we don't know: he seems to be a little eccentric: but mind, Jenny, he is an engaged man."

Jenny blushed a bright red at this information, chiefly from the vexation that always assails a person of quick perception when they discover that they are being indirectly warned, and "talked at." Never very prone to restrain that quick spirit of hers, she flashed out an answer.

"Thanks, Martha, for your good intention; but I don't need your caution; *yet*, at all events. I am not in love with Mr. Henry Carrick."

Martha turned the colour of the Red Room itself. "Now, Jenny, that is so like you."

"So like me to see straight through your transparencies," laughed Jenny, recovering her good humour. "But if you *wouldn't* beat round the bush with me, Martha!"

"Well, well, dear, I should not like you to be taken-in by a meaningless flirt," said Mrs. Carrick. "Good night, and pleasant dreams to you!"

She shut the door softly and went away thinking, quite unaware that Henry Carrick was the hero of Jenny's singular dreams—for that young lady had not told it. "She is going away to-morrow, and so much the better," thought that estimably-prudent matron.

But the next day, when Henry Carrick walked in to The Gables with that pleasant, easy manner of his, an hour or so before Jenny's departure, on some flimsy errand concerning a fan he had unwittingly taken away in his pocket, Mrs. Martha's fears and suspicions bristled up again. And in spite of her clever manœuvring (which both saw through), he accompanied them to the station to see Jenny off by the train.

"It is quite shameful, Frank!" whispered Mrs. Carrick. "He has got her on his arm—do you see—leaving you and me to ourselves."

"Oh, dreadful!" gravely assented Frank. "What a goose you are, Martha!"

But the train was soon off; Jenny, all in tears, in it; and Mrs. Carrick breathed freely again.

"When are you going to be married, Mr. Henry?" she took courage to enquire.

"Don't know at all," he answered.

"We heard you were engaged."

"Oh, did you?"

Which was all Mrs. Martha got out of him.

A month, or so, went on. July came in; and on one of its earlier days Martha Carrick heard the astounding news that Henry was staying at Nalem, and might be often seen with Miss Malcolm.

"Frank, I shall go down to Nalem by the first train to-morrow morning and do my duty!"

"Nonsense," returned Frank.

"Indeed, I shall. And bring Jenny to her senses. He is staying down there with that fast George Otley, who owns a yacht, I hear, and no end of other wicked elements of snare and delusion."

"If it wasn't for this queer engagement of his, it would be all right," remarked Mr. Carrick, when he had done laughing.

"What?" from Mrs. Martha, in accents of indignant amazement. "You can say *that*, knowing Henry Carrick to be an unprincipled flirt."

It was now Frank Carrick's turn to look amazed. "An unprincipled flirt! Henry Carrick! Where did you get that idea, I should like to know?"

"Where should I get it? From you, sir."

"Now, Martha, you are too heedless. I told you once that Henry was an odd fellow, and though very attractive to women, we didn't consider him a marrying man. I never said he was a flirt: he is nothing so contemptible. For a rich man and an idle one, he is wonderfully well-behaved in all ways. And dear little Jenny might be proud to gain his hand if it were in the market."

"But it is *not* in the market, sir. There's no beating sense into any of you men; that there isn't. To Nalem I go to-morrow."

And to Nalem she went by an early train, her husband dutifully escorting her. Things were far worse than even Mrs. Martha had anticipated. She found quite a charming little society at that dull place Nalem: boating clubs and sailings on the sea by moonlight, and picnics and such like (as she was pleased to express it) snares and delusions. Jenny interrupted her promptly in her first assault.

"Don't say disagreeable things about Mr. Carrick, Martha. He is my friend, nothing more, I assure you. But he *is* my friend; we can like our friends too well to hear them attacked unjustly, and you are attacking Henry Carrick unjustly when you accuse him of trifling with me. He has been very kind and courteous to me. He knew from the first that I knew of this engagement."

Martha drew a deep breath. Put down in this way, she could say no more. Jenny did remember his engagement, it seemed, and so—she must be left to her own devices. "What girls are coming to

nowadays I can't think," said Mrs. Martha in her husband's ear; upon which, he told her she was no more than a girl herself. As they were thus talking together in old Aunt Malcolm's pretty front sitting-room, Henry Carrick entered with Jenny. He saw the good young woman whispering, and an audacious smile crossed his face.

"There's thunder in the air," quoth he, looking seaward, where a piled-up mass of heavy clouds was rising.

A flash of lightning sparkled in Mrs. Martha's eyes. She had taken the remark to herself. The wind was really rising high, and Jenny attempted to close the window. Quite a gale seemed to be blowing in, and Henry Carrick sprang to her assistance. As he turned back, Frank held towards him a small, flat, Russia leather case he had just picked up from the floor. The cover, fallen back, disclosed a portion of a photograph, and, that, a photograph of a woman.

"Yours, Henry?"

A nod of thanks and that same curious smile again from Henry Carrick.

"That mysterious sweetheart of yours, Henry, I suppose? Come, it is time you told us something further about her, I think."

There was a certain rough decision in Frank Carrick's voice, despite his half-jocular manner. Martha saw, did *they* see, the sudden pallor of Jenny's face at this? Was it the sight of that pallor that produced a change in Henry Carrick's demeanour? His gaiety, his lightness fled, and after an instant of hesitation, he seemed to come to a sudden resolution with an effort; an effort that brought a tinge of colour to his cheek, and a new tone into his voice. He moved his chair slightly forward, and began:

"You think I should tell you something further about my mysterious sweetheart, as you call her. I will tell you all that I know myself. About a year ago, when I was in Munich, I received a letter from my sister Kate, containing her usual badinage, her speculations and questionings about my prospect of settling in life, as she called it. She said she had heard, through friends in Paris—the Heydons, you know—that I was very attentive to a mysterious young Polish girl who had been in society for a short time there. I had met this Polish girl but three times, as it happened, and knew nothing more about her. Just after I had finished reading Kate's letter, it chanced that I went into John Carew's studio. He was studying art in Munich, as I think you have heard. On his easel, as I went in, a picture met my eyes that attracted me, for two reasons; the beauty of the face, and the strangely old-fashioned look of the dress which the figure was arrayed in. I asked who it was. He told me it was a copy he had been making of an old miniature he had brought with him from home, the portrait of his mother's grand aunt, Drusilla Carew. We examined this picture for awhile together, and then he went out to keep an engagement, leaving me to wait his return. I was sitting

directly in front of the portrait, and I had to wait there an hour. I don't mean to say that I was studying the portrait all that time; I was thinking of a hundred other things; but I found after I had left the studio that the pictured face pursued me. I went straight to a musical party where I met several distinguished artists; but through all the talk and the music, and the throng of very pretty women, every now and then I would see in my mind's eye, as we say, Miss Drusilla Carew. The next day I went again to Carew's studio, and told him how his ancestress had haunted me. He laughed and remarked: 'She's coming back to atone to one of your family, I suppose, for her perfidy in the past.' I was all at sea at this, greatly to his surprise, for he had supposed that all the Carricks knew the old family tradition. However, I heard it then and there for the first time from his lips; the old story which I dare say you know, Frank; that a certain Miss Drusilla Carew broke faith, and broke the heart of one Henry Carrick a century ago; or at any rate worked a good deal of mischief with his life."

Frank nodded. "Yes, I know that old story, Henry: but what connection has it ——"

"With *my* story, you would ask? It is the very root of it—as you will see if you have patience. After John had related the old tradition to me, he produced several photographs that he had taken of this portrait, and allowed me my choice. Evidently, he declared, Miss Drusilla had some interest in me by thus haunting me, and it was but fair that I should possess her picture: and he would enquire afterwards, when we met, how my phantom sweetheart was. Writing to Kate about this time, I carried the joke on by telling her I had at last met my fate, which I hoped would put her enquiring mind at rest; but that as things were not settled, I could not yet tell her the lady's name. John Carew unwittingly helped it on further, when writing to his brother Charles, by making mysterious mention of painting the portrait of Harry Carrick's intended. Kate spread the news right and left. Of course I intended to undeceive them at my leisure, but she and Charley went off, as you know, on their exploring tour to the world's end, and by all appearance mean to stay there. So ——"

"Then you are not engaged?" interrupted Mrs. Frank Carrick.

"Not yet," laughed Harry. "I don't know how soon I may be."

"Now, I call that a downright swindle! You ——"

"Do let him go on, Patty."

"Right, Frank; I want to go on. Three days after my return I was at a concert at St. James's Hall. Hearing a slight commotion near me, I turned to see a young lady holding out a fan, and in this young lady's face I saw that of Drusilla Carew. I believe I may have been very rude in my close observation, which I hope she has forgiven"—with a smile, and a quick glance at Jenny's face, pale and full of emotion. "But I declare I hardly knew at the moment whether I saw a vision or a reality."

"All this ought to be put in a book," breathed Martha.

"Some matters took me out of town. The day I got back I heard of your evening gathering for that night, Frank; and I thought I would make one at it. A minute after I entered your rooms I saw again the realisation of the portrait: not in the old-world attire of Drusilla Carew, but in a ravishing modern costume of airy white gossamer, with pink roses. Here's the photograph."

It was certainly Jenny's face. It was wonderful!

"Drusilla Carew was Jane Malcolm's grand-aunt," spoke Frank, "or her mother's; I forget which. But Drusilla, poor soul, didn't break the other Henry's heart, Harry: she had her's broken instead. That old Colonel and his sister—whose ward she was—made up the match between her and his nephew, Henry Carrick, who had not a sou, they say, while she was rich. Drusilla rebelled; she loved somebody else, it's said; and they shut her up in a certain Red Room of the Carrick homestead—my homestead now. There they threatened, and persecuted, and starved her, until the poor thing died of a very rapid decline. At least, that was the account given to the world. And ever since then, the story runs that at certain times and to certain persons, that cruel Colonel Carrick and his sister appear in a dream, and rehearse over again their old wicked persecution. I always thought this a great piece of humbug, until Jenny, the first night she slept in my house, and in the Red Room, too, had the dream, and then I hardly knew what to think."

"Did you dream of *me*!" asked, softly, Henry Carrick. Which question Miss Jenny wholly declined to answer, except in blushes.

But Mr. Henry Carrick took an opportunity of putting it again when they were alone. And also another question which followed naturally upon it.

"I fell in love with her that night at your house, you see," he said to Frank; "if I had not already done so at the concert."

And there was very soon a wedding at Nalem; at which Mrs. Martha played first fiddle.

"And now that they are man and wife, Frank," she said to her husband, "I do trust that dreadful room of ours will no longer be haunted."

"Never was haunted yet," returned Frank, sceptical as ever. Nevertheless, Frank cannot explain, quite to his own satisfaction, the why and the wherefore of Jenny's dream.

While Henry Carrick, listening again and again to his dear little wife's recital of it, is content to take Shakespeare's view—that there are more things in Heaven and earth than are dreamt of in our philosophy.

N. P.

THE CRUISE OF THE RESERVE SQUADRON.

BY CHARLES W. WOOD,
AUTHOR OF "THROUGH HOLLAND," ETC.



RUINED WATER TOWER, ALHAMBRA.

WE left Malaga in the early morning. The railway company had provided a saloon carriage, for which we paid half as much again as the ordinary fare, but it made all the difference both to the pleasure and the comfort of our long journey. A small crowd had collected to see us off, yet, if there was anything unusual, there certainly was nothing eccentric in our appearance. Perhaps it was merely a way of showing their good-will towards Englishmen in general, and the British Navy in particular. But when the mind is awakened to a spirit of adventure, small incidents are magnified into importance above their due; and so the little crowd, whatever we

were to them, became to us a source of something more than mere amusement. We looked upon them as a good omen. Certainly, if in their hearts they speeded the parting guests, their prayers were answered. Success and happiness attended us.

The train slowly left the town. The cathedral, with its one solitary tower, rose conspicuously above the houses; to the left, the long, flat, far-stretching plain, dotted about with tenements and factories, was bounded on the one side by distant hills, on the other by the clear waters of the Mediterranean; the masts of the shipping in the harbour rising like a small forest of trees, straight and bare and lifeless. Above all were the blue sky and the glowing sunshine—soon, indeed, to glow with furnace heat.

It was a most romantic journey, especially between Malaga and Bobadilla; a succession of scenes crowded with features that were new at least to one of the party, who had travelled little in Spain,

and was still unfamiliar with any land of palms and pomegranates. Throughout the day one grand feature after another excited our admiration. Vast ranges of hills, sometimes so close upon us that passages were cut between, or tunnels beneath them; falling so far back as to melt into dreams and visions, and seem a week's journey distant. Here an immense mountain of solid rock rose out of the midst of a severe plain, guiltless of vegetation; nor tree, nor shrub, nor fern finding foothold or taking root thereon. Immense plateaux stretched around, large enough, apparently, to colonise; tracts of country that looked unproductive, uncultivated, disowned; no token of human habitation in all their vast extent; no sign of the picturesque Spanish peasant in what appeared an untrodden world, lonely, desolate and sad.

And then again, for miles and miles, hour after hour, an opposite picture. Hills and vast plains, but laughing and sunny and "running over with corn and oil." Endless extents of the aloe; orange groves, olive yards, vineyards without number; palms and myrtles; the sage-green or grey-green of the olive tree always conspicuous. Rivers ran their course and fertilised the farms, on which much care seemed to be bestowed. The country undulated in flowing outlines. Nestling under the shelter of a hill, or boldly confronting the world from the summit, one frequently saw a picturesque farmhouse, painted some bright colour; pink or yellow, or, sometimes, red; yet, however brilliant, never looking out of place or glaring or vulgar in these rich and laughing slopes and verdant valleys, this dazzling, intoxicating ether and radiant sunshine.

Picturesque houses were they, with flat roofs—for here they fear neither rain from the skies nor snow from the mountains—and verandahs to shade and subdue the rooms; and, more often than not, trellis-work holding the trailing, clinging vine, adorning the walls with grace and beauty, and suggesting rich red streams and bacchanalian banquets, at which certainly the Spanish temperament would prove no skeleton at the feast.

There was often a long interval between one house and the next, as if each farm possessed vast tracts to itself. Yet these farms require less manual labour than those of more northern climes. They consist so much of orange groves and olive yards, that they may be left very much to look after themselves, while their owners sleep away the sultry summer hours. A strange life, this turning night into day; coming out, like the owls and the bats, with the going down of the sun; finding one's pleasure and happiness and social enjoyment chiefly beneath the dark tranquil skies of night, the stars and the silvery moon. Here she should ever be at the full: though human nature, after all, most appreciates those blessings that are chequered by the shadows of occasional withdrawal.

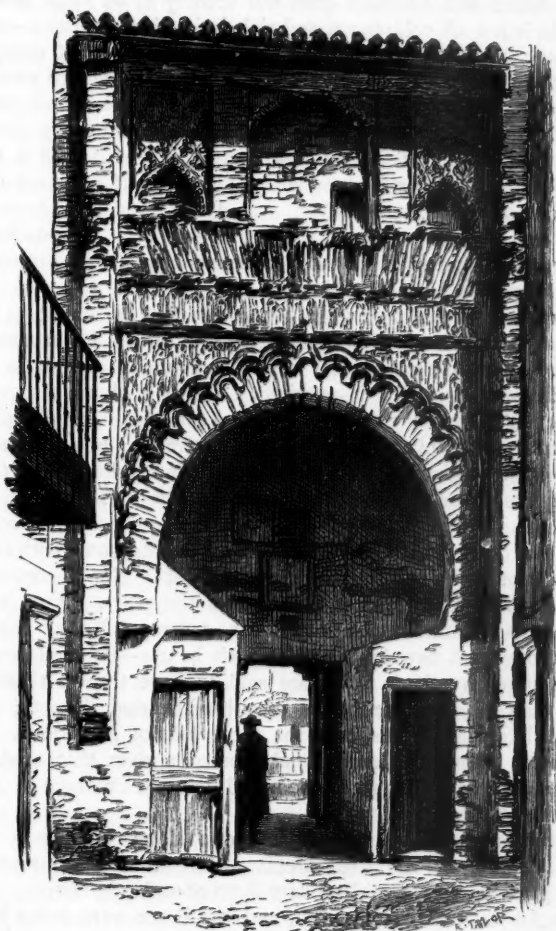
These houses, so far from any other sign of life, seem to have retired from the world. But occasionally we came to towns and

villages, and the train would halt long at a place with a romantic name, losing the precious minutes apparently for no earthly purpose but to teach us a lesson in patience. Very picturesque were some of these stations, especially when covered with the graceful vine, or brilliant with rich scarlet blooms that stretched upwards to the very roof with a glowing, gorgeous effect quite tropical in its vividness and abundance. Our tints, coming to slower maturity in a harder climate and denser atmosphere, are quieter and more subdued. But in these richer tints, which seem, as it were, to reflect the very brilliancy of the sun itself, there is no undue prominence to offend the eye; however intense, they suggest only gorgeousness, magnificence, and beauty; a tribute to the wonderful powers of reproductive creation.

The wild, grand scenery between Malaga and Bobadilla, sometimes reached the sublime. A succession of plains and valleys—lovely orange groves that make the air heavy with luscious scent when the trees are in bloom, and before the blossoms have given place to the round ripe fruit that hangs so gracefully upon the boughs—though for actual beauty the orange is inferior to the lemon tree. There were great tracts of country and distant mountains, and, especially after Alora, valleys planted with the pomegranate and the citron, and banks studded with the aloe and the prickly pear. And then we entered upon a succession of tunnels hewn out of granite hills that pressed upon us—the series of excavations some 5,000 metres long. The hills were lofty and splendidly severe. For a moment we caught sight of a magnificent gorge, deep, wild and romantic; rushing water coursed over a rocky bed in this precipitous ravine—this “valley of rocks.” But no sooner was the glorious vision entered upon than it passed and was gone; the tunnel once more shut out all but the darkness and obscurity.

Our first principal halt was at Bobadilla. Here twenty-five minutes were allowed for a well-arranged breakfast. A long room, two long tables, a table-d'hôte meal, abundant, not badly dressed, and quickly served by waiters. Broadley spent all his spare time in watching the capacities of a young girl seated at the table with her father. She looked about fourteen, and, we concluded, must be on her way home from school, where they had kept her on very short allowance during the whole term. A conjuror could hardly have been more expert, or produced a greater effect upon his audience, as we watched both knife and fork pressed into the service, and alternately raised with a rapidity that seemed magical, meeting half way as they went up and down, like buckets in a well. Her father watched her with fond affection and intense pride, while I was lost in wondering whether Broadley's eyes or the interesting young lady's mouth possessed greater capacities for expanding. Then a waiter came with a wooden bowl to collect the money, and before time was quite up we had returned to our places, and were ready to start again.

After Bobadilla, we went on, hour after hour, through the burden and heat of the day. The sun glared like a furnace; soda-water grew hot, ice refused to remain ice any longer; windows and blinds were put up and down, but the heat refused to be shut out, and



ANCIENT GATEWAY, GRANADA.

there was no cool air to be let in. Hour after hour we went slowly through the Province of Malaga, with its great plains, often wild and severe, lonely and lonesome. Now and then we saw workers in the fields, or men threshing out corn. Occasionally a string of picturesque peasants straggled along the roads, the girls' heads garlanded

with vine leaves, as if they were about to pay a visit to the Temple of Bacchus. Muleteers completed the picture, their "beasts of burden" well laden, and probably not altogether as indifferent to the heat as they appeared.

Less fertile and beautiful grew the scenery as we made progress; for Spain is not all voluptuous and rich in its characteristics—nor by any means so. Its mountains—it is essentially a land of mountains—are often rugged, rocky, and barren; its plains, of vast extent, so utterly abandoned, to all appearance, that they become inexpressibly sad and gloomy to the traveller. Yet is there something grand in these solitudes: you feel lost, bewildered, oppressed with a feeling of desolateness in their contemplation, almost as if you had missed your hold of life and the world. And still they appeal—as only Nature can—to one's sense of the sublime and the unbounded, just as the ocean or an immense range of snow-capped hills will often fill the mind with awe and admiration.

We came to the ancient town of Antequera—the Anticaria of the Romans—with its old Moorish castle, built upon Roman remains, and perched upon the slope of a hill—hill and castle all so much one sad, grey colour that it required a steady look to discover the building. The romantic town overlooks a great plain, which possesses a salt lake. The plain is fertile and cultivated; but romance has here and there given place to reality and enterprise in the form of great square factories. Antequera had the deserted, abandoned look which marks so many towns in Spain, where you may often see rows and streets of tenements, some without casements, some with shutters only to protect them from the noonday heat. Not a creature will be found wandering from end to end of the place. Near us rose an immense granite mass, called the "Lovers' Rock," from the summit of which two fond and foolish hearts—deluded souls!—clasped in each other's arms, are said to have thrown themselves, rather than fall into the hands of a hard-hearted, despotic parent. Beyond, like sugar-loaves, rose the three hills of Archidona. Then we passed through a long tunnel, crossed a river that to-day was almost dried up in its rocky bed, and left the Province of Malaga for that of Granada.

Next came Loja, an ancient and dilapidated town in a narrow valley, watered by the river Genil. More than one stream here makes glad the plains, and renders them abundantly fertile. Loja is famous for its fruit and crayfish, and the latter were being hawked about the station. We bought a basket, whilst we traced the course of the rapid river, whence the fish had come, sweeping downwards like a small torrent: refreshing the ancient town, that, basking between the hills of the Sierra de Ronda, in the heat of summer scarce knows how to bear its burden.

The fish were alive and beautifully packed in the little red wicker basket, covered with damp green moss and criss-crossed with string.

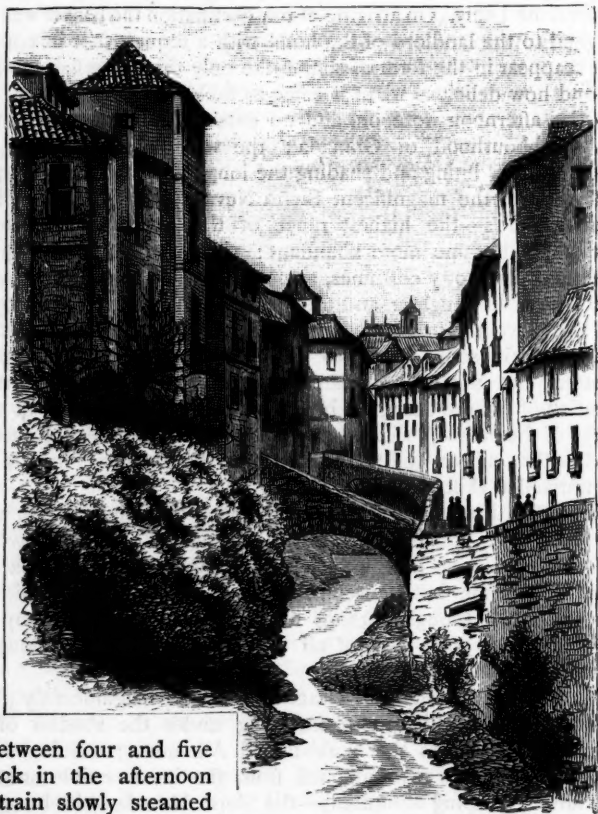
The man asked fifteen pence for the fish, the basket, the moss, the string, the time and the trouble, and we would have given it; but our courier insisted upon bargaining. Perhaps for the sake of keeping up the custom; or keeping down the price; perhaps because it was the right thing to do. Whatever the reason, he boldly offered half the sum. Then followed the usual drama, which ended in the man going off with the diminished amount, and seeming to think he had not done badly. On arriving at our destination the basket was duly consigned to the landlord of the hotel, with a request that its contents might reappear in the form of soup—the only thing crayfish are good for—and how delicious when it came to table!

So the afternoon wore on, and we entered into the more immediate neighbourhood of Granada; the wide sweeping plain, the avenues of trees lining and shading the long, white, dusty roads; the far-off chain of the magnificent Sierra Nevada, with its eternal, inexhaustible snows—the highest range of this mountainous country. Signs of life became more abundant; villages and houses; groups of peasants in showy costumes, sometimes passing so near that we could hear their laughter and their songs. And small idea, by the way, the Spanish peasants seem to have of music and melody. Most of their songs seem to be characterised by a Gregorian monotony, but not a Gregorian grandeur. Long drawn-out notes, suggestive of infinite dearth of invention, is the chief feature of these "songs of the people," without any trace of the wild, weird, Bohemian melodies that suit so well the guitar which the Spaniards handle with such unrivalled skill.

We passed through cultivated fields, many of them growing a tall, wavy stalk with small green leaves; a species of lemon-flavoured mint the Spaniards, and especially the Moors, make into a kind of tea, wholesome but nauseous. It is also distilled into a liqueur, more palatable, though perhaps not so harmless as the cup that only cheers. A good deal of all this smiling territory belongs to the Duke of Wellington.

Then we came in sight of Granada itself, so magnificently placed in that immense, hill-girt, plain, lying under the shadow of the heights that possesses the world-famed Alhambra; echoing to the sound of rippling waters supplied from the inexhaustible snows of those far-off, sleeping mountains—the Sierra Nevada—the boast and pride even of mountainous Spain. Here the cactus and the aloe, the myrtle and the palm-tree, the pomegranate and the orange, the citron and the tall, waving Indian grass contribute to the beauty and abundance of the province. And over all, and above all, impregnating the very air, and seeming to tinge the very sky with a blue brighter than its own, is the feeling that you are on enchanted ground; about to behold a dream of dreams, a vision of years; a glory and a fame that have lived through the centuries. All is seen through a halo of romance that perhaps no other spot on earth can

claim. For here you have reached the mystic, romantic regions of the ancient Moors, the wonderful Alhambra: a place more full of dreamy charm and enchantment than all the glowing tales of Arabia, more poetical than poetry itself; where the song of the nightingale is the only fitting accompaniment to the murmur of falling waters, and surely in the very moonbeams faeries hold their courts.



Between four and five o'clock in the afternoon the train slowly steamed into Granada. Our courier, well up to his work, had telegraphed for vehicles at the station and for rooms at the hotel. The terminus lies outside the town, and in clouds of dust we were soon clattering through the tree-lined avenues, within sound of the waters of the Genil and the Darro. On through an ancient gateway that led into a narrow, ill-paved, straggling street, its houses on either side old, dirty and dilapidated; many of the casements barred like the windows of a prison: mute witnesses to a past reign of terror, when

OLD HOUSES ON THE DARRO, GRANADA.

iron bars were only too necessary to keep out the lawless and protect the weak ; though they were powerless against many a well-aimed shot that shattered the glass, and stilled for ever the warm pulse beating behind it.

Sweeping round, and crossing a wide thoroughfare, we again entered a narrow, tortuous street leading up to the great Grecian gate that admits you into the hallowed precincts of the Alhambra. This reached, we immediately found ourselves within the charmed circle of the outer walls, and passed out of the broad sunlight into the grateful obscurity of a splendid avenue of trees. The ascent was steep and tolerably long, as if the magic halls of the Alhambra, like success in life, were only to be gained through toil and labour ; but there was a solemnity about the approach worthy its reputation. Without these trees, where in spring you may listen to the song of the nightingale, and where to-day as we went, the rich note of the blackbird awoke echoes in the still air, the approach would not have been half so effective ; and they are there thanks to the judgment of the late Duke of Wellington.

Finally, reaching the end of the Avenue—turning by the “Red Towers,” and obtaining for a moment a glimpse of the sweeping plain below and the far-off mountains—we saw before us, on either side the road, a goodly pile—the two hotels within the precincts of the Alhambra ; long, pleasant-looking buildings, very much resembling each other in all but name. Rooms had been reserved for us at the “Washington Irving,” and we found no reason to regret the choice ; probably the “Sute Suelos” would have proved equally comfortable and accommodating.

In the glow and excitement of first setting foot on this charmed soil, Broadley was handed a telegram announcing his promotion. Surely never had mortal received good news under happier circumstances, at a more fitting moment, or in better “form” for its due appreciation. Surely a brighter halo of beauty and romance was thrown over all he subsequently saw—if that were possible. And surely he were guilty of absolute callousness not to look back for ever upon that trip with feelings of unusual and extreme pleasure, wherein a “fortuitous concourse of events” had combined to thus paint the rainbow of his life.

It was now past five o'clock, and we decided to visit the Alhambra by night. First impressions are everything, and beautiful as are these legendary halls and courts, their charms are exalted to an unearthly, unreal pitch of romance by the soft silvery moonlight, so brilliant and intensified in this rarified atmosphere. We were fortunate, for to-night the moon would be at the full.

The fortress of the Alhambra was built by the Moorish kings of Granada, and capable of holding an army of 40,000 men within the shelter of its outer walls. It was situated on the crest of a lofty hill, a spur of the great Sierra Nevada chain, commanding a view of

the town, the immense surrounding plains and far-off hills: the whole forming one of the finest panoramas in the wide world. The palace of the Alhambra—all that now remains of the ancient glory of this kingly resort—forms but a small section of the territory of the Alhambra itself. Its halls and courts have passed through so many hands, experienced so much wilful destruction and alteration, the marvel is that one stone is left standing upon another. It is difficult to realise what it must have been in the days of its Moorish grandeur. The most magnificent, most gorgeous edifice of modern times sinks into insignificance and the common-place, almost into vulgarity itself, when compared with its matchless refinement, its inconceivable grace and beauty.

The outer walls are thirty feet high, and six feet wide. The name dates as far back as the 9th century, and the Red Towers, still existing, are probably the earliest portion of this marvellous structure. Parts were added at intervals during the next few centuries; but not until the year 1248 was the true and present Alhambra commenced:—the palace that has come down to posterity, has been the delight of the world, whose very name has fallen into a proverb for all that is chaste and lovely and of good report.

The palace erected by Bâdis in the 11th century was standing, and Ibn-l-Ahmar, the founder of the Masrite dynasty, determined to build a new portion, surpassing in splendour and magnificence all that had ever been heard of or any that might exist. The palace was called Kasru-l-hamra. Ibn-l-Ahmar died, leaving the continuation of the work to his son, Mohammed II. One king after another added to its extent and beauty, which culminated about the year 1354, in the reign of Yusuf I., the richest, if not the most powerful, of all the Moorish kings. So grew the Alhambra by degrees into perfection.

Then came the conquest of Granada by the Christians, and the reign of the Moors ended with Boabdil. The Alhambra for a time continued to be a royal residence, and was inhabited by the Castilian monarchs, but in this respect its glory ceased with the Moresco-Spanish dominion in Granada. Perhaps it was too beautiful and too refined for the Roman Catholic sovereigns; or they may have thought that it savoured of heathendom, and that no blessing could rest upon it; or the marvellous pile may have suggested a voluptuous effeminacy little suited to their ideas and temperament. Whatever the cause, the sun of the Alhambra had set, and it lived on in a sort of afterglow.

It had to submit to changes and alterations, and the best was done to spoil it. Charles V. began a palace within the walls of the fortress, adjoining the ancient building; but constant shocks of earthquake, as if Nature herself protested against the sacrilege, compelled him to abandon his purpose. The walls are still standing, and upon them the eye first rests in visiting the Alhambra: walls of massive masonry, richly carved, out of all character and keeping with the fairy-like halls

and courts that would have been crushed with the weight of their presence. Fortunately nothing can be seen until you have passed beyond the offending ruins to the retired little entrance that, with the magic of an "open Sesame," admits you at once into enchanted realms.

Philip V. and his queen, Elizabeth of Parma, early in the eighteenth century, were the last monarchs to make a residence of the Alhambra. Philip Italianised the building, and otherwise did it much harm. In the next century came the French, who would have razed it to the ground. Mines were laid, and the fuses actually lighted; but they were discovered, and put out just in time, by a corporal of Invalidos, who, for this service done to the world, ought to have been ennobled and canonised. This was about the year 1810, when the Duke of Wellington did such good service to Spain that its gratitude took the form of presenting him with a marquisate, and so much territory in the immediate neighbourhood. The French had turned the Alhambra into barracks and magazines, had destroyed, amongst other depredations, the Moorish mosque built by Mohammed III. in the fourteenth century, which is said to have been without parallel in the world.

Seeing then that, in spite of chances and changes, so much of the Alhambra remains to this day, no wonder it has been said to bear a charmed existence. And truly, were it to disappear from the face of the earth, it would be a calamity for all time.

This enchanted territory we were about to see for ourselves. The dinner-hour would not yet sound, and the moment had come for the view from the "Watch-Tower," the Torre de la Vela; most effective and most beautiful when, towards sunset, the lights and shadows are strong upon the vast plain, and a golden glow precedes the fleeting purple of twilight.

We entered a narrow, up-hill pathway, the broad avenue to the left, with its giant elms, which grew tall and straight as poplars, and did not spread their branches. Cherry-trees of amazing height, tall and straight as the elms, found place amongst them. Birds sang in the leaves, which the courier declared were nightingales, but we felt were simply blackbirds and thrushes; songsters only less beautiful than the one songster that outrivals all others. To the right, beside the path, a stream rippled and murmured; one of the many tributaries that make of Granada a plain of running waters, wonderfully fertile; in summer combining a southern richness with almost the cool breezes of the north.

We reached a square, massive, Moorish tower, the Gate of Justice; so-called because, during the Moslem reign, all petty trials were heard and judged within its porch—an ancient custom, frequently alluded to in Holy Writ. The arch, of horse-shoe form, and half the height of the building, was noble and imposing. In the centre, on the keystone, was engraved a hand; and within the arch, on

the keystone of the portal, was traced a key. One tradition holds that the hand was intended as the emblem of Doctrine; the key, that of Faith. Another, that the Moors engraved the symbols, declaring no Christian should pass within the walls until the hand came down, grasped the key, and threw wide the gates. The latter interpretation, as approaching nearest to the marvellous, the mysterious, and the magical, most commended itself to our guide. Again, it has been said that the open hand was merely intended to represent hospitality—a duty so sacred in the East, that, once eat salt with a man in his own tent, and you may rely upon his after fidelity. And, yet once more, tradition has it that the device was simply meant to act as a talisman against the "evil eye."

We passed into a narrow lane, between high walls, which led upwards, and ended in a square opening, called the Place of the Cisterns. Here a deep well was supplied from great reservoirs cut in the rock beneath by those wonderful Moors, who seemed as persevering and successful in all they undertook, as in their tastes they were refined and cultivated. It almost made one shudder to look into the black depth, drop a pebble and listen to the far-off splash. Our guide lowered the bucket that stood on the circular brick-enclosure, and presently brought up a supply of icy water, of which nearly everyone, out of mere curiosity, took a draught. An Eastern well, but no Rebecca waiting for any Isaac. Probably many Rebeccas have in their time waited here for many Isaacs, and will wait again.

Then we went on to the Torre de la Vela, where a summons at the door raised within a shrill female scream, and finally brought forth a custodian who looked as old as the building itself, and far more tottering. But he gave us admittance, and led the way up the steep, dark, well-worn staircase to the summit of the tower—a roof some twenty feet square, more or less, open to all the cardinal points, and on one side a silver bell swung in a sort of gibbet.

And what a scene was here disclosed! We gazed upon what is said to be one of the three finest, most extensive and most romantic panoramas in the world. Turn which way we would, nothing but beauty and grandeur met the eye. The sun was sinking westward, and in the vast plain a far-off mist was slowly creeping upwards like a sun-flushed, inflowing tide. The tower was built on the spur of the hill, and we looked down into quite precipitous depths. At our feet lay the town, the cathedral conspicuous in its midst; streets were clearly traced, and white houses gleamed. The palm tree raised its head; the cactus, the myrtle and the prickly pear abounded.

The Darro ran its course between banks picturesque and shady with trees. Far as the eye could reach stretched the wonderful plain of the Vega, bounded on the west by a range of hills, where our guide pointed out ancient towns and hoary battlements that had rather to be taken upon trust. Here and there, indeed, we noted a

solitary watch-tower that must have done good service in ancient days, whence many a decisive battle was followed in its course, and kingdoms rose and fell between sunrise and sunset. Defiles, just perceptible, led up the mountains into a world beyond. Wild, cold and desolate they looked, yet strangely interesting as imagination peopled them with the countless armies that have passed through them to victory or defeat. And one vision stood out above all others: that of poor Boabdil, conquered, exiled, passing through the plain, entering the pass, looking back upon his beloved country, and weeping over his downfall; all that was gentle and sad in him rising



GATE OF JUSTICE, ALHAMBRA.

to the surface as he slowly went on his way to the land of Morocco, where, in fighting for another's country, he was to lose the life he had not hazarded to save his own. Far off, in the centre of the Vega, reposed the city of Santa Fé.

Higher and more glorious than all was the snowy range of the Sierra Nevada; those mountains that are the boast of Grenada, and like a beacon are visible and seem to overshadow the province from end to end; even to the shores of the Mediterranean and far-off Gib; for Bradley and I had noted them from the watch-tower on the top of the Rock; had seen them looking like dream hills belonging to another world, reaching into the heavens. It is the highest range in Spain; its snows are eternal, in summer ever melting, yet never

exhausted ; feeding the streams that, supplying the plains with water, render them especially fertile and beautiful ; rich in orange groves and olive yards, vineyards and fruit-laden orchards ; all of which we traced in one immense field of abundance from the Torre de la Vela.

On the opposite side, almost lost in the vast surrounding, reposed the wonderful Alhambra, and still nearer and more conspicuous, the ruder walls of Charles V.'s palace. Nothing of the Alhambra's peculiar beauty was visible : a few roofs and towers, a small dome, sections like the lines on a map—this was all ; the whole overhanging a steep precipice or ravine. And down, under the slope of the hill, were the caves of the gipsies, with their low, mysterious little doorways that gave admittance—to what sort of a life ? The slopes were covered with the prickly pear. Higher up the hill, and overlooking the Alhambra, was the palace of the Generalife, with its picturesque gardens, once the summer resort of the kings of Granada. Enclosing all in a straggling, oblong form, the outer walls, turret-crowned at intervals, surrounded the whole territory of the ancient fortress.

The sun sank lower, and the golden mist in the plains of the Vega, crept up slowly, and ascended like incense, veiling, not blotting out the landscape. The snow-capped Sierra Nevada grew flushed and rosy ; here and there, some object, bright as a shield, caught the sun's reflection, and flashed and glowed like a thing of fire. The murmur of running streams might be faintly heard ; a sound refreshing and romantic at all times, but especially so here. The town lay at our feet, cool, calm, deserted-looking—and compared with its ancient glory, it may indeed be called a dead city. The white walls of the houses, with their picturesque red roofs, stood out in exquisite contrast and colouring with the surrounding scene.

Suddenly the old man pulled a rope from below and struck a blow upon the silver bell, whose vibrations went floating into the vast space. It has to be tolled so many times an hour between 9 P.M. and 4 A.M., and on a still night may be heard thirty miles off. It is a comparatively small bell, but the light atmosphere conveys sound to incredible distances. Some say it is an old custom intended to frighten away the Evil One—like the griffins and gurgoyles on our cathedrals, which certainly might well have a corresponding effect upon all Good Influences : but in reality it is meant as a signal to the irrigators in the plains, who, at their work all night, have to alternately open and close the sluices. Yet it was not quite easy to fathom the mystery of this arrangement, from the description presently given to us by the landlord of the "Washington Irving."

After long gazing from all quarters of the tower, coming back to each one over and over again, we reluctantly turned from the marvellous scene. I almost think we left there our hearts, whilst in our memories would certainly be found its undying traces. Once more down the winding narrow staircase, even as we had gone up : and at the bottom a youthful Rebecca—no doubt curious, like all

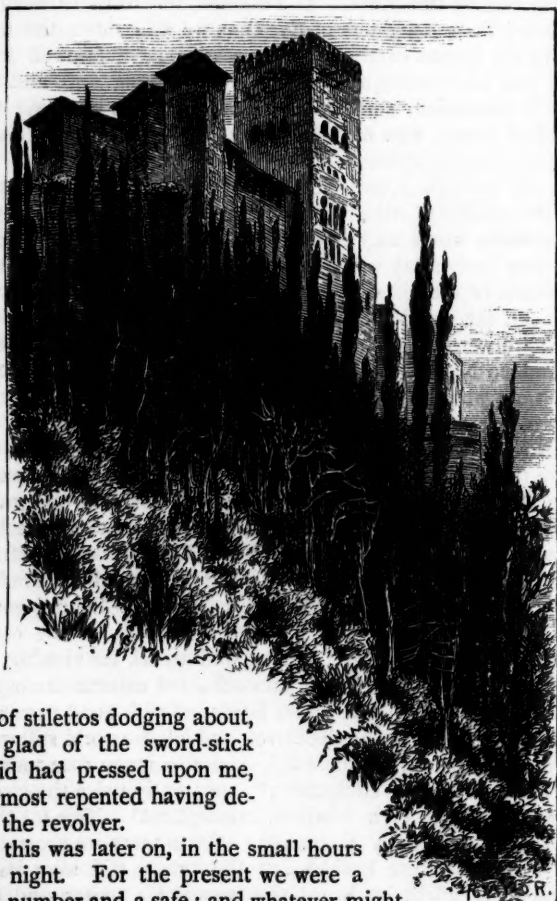
the daughters of Eve—waiting to open the outer door for us and admit us to freedom. But she was the old custodian's daughter—the child of his old age—the apple of his eye—and possibly the plague of his life. No sooner in sight of her than he sternly banished her to unseen regions and took her place, an equally efficient, but not equally comely substitute. The maiden, not to be baffled (when are they ever, these daughters of Eve?) as we went down the narrow pathway to the Square of the Cisterns, waved us a farewell from a casement just wide enough to admit a bewitching arm, and a face wreathed in melancholy smiles. Somehow she made me think of the Fair Maid of Peake, who had thrown the lily at Arosa Bay, and was then languishing in captivity.

Down past the palace, and the office of the architect: the latter full of beautiful models of Alhambra doors and windows and courts, and Alhambra vases, which may all be purchased for a consideration—so that you may carry away with you a fragment of the very atmosphere and romance of the place. Onward into the shady avenue, where the birds still sang, and the brook still rippled on its way. We trod upon air; we were living in a dream; we were in the enchanted land of the Arabian Nights. Surely the Slave of the Lamp would appear, and the trees would sparkle with jewels, and caves would open and admit us to dazzling realms.

But on reaching the hotel, and coming back to the ruder needs of life, we felt, with Lord Byron, that it was a pity the pleasures of the table should be a necessity of existence. Yet no one probably took his seat with positive reluctance, or objected to the *recherché* repast specially prepared for our benefit. Even Broadley, after one suggestive, inquisitive glance as to whether I would second him, ventured not to utter the mysterious syllables of Shandy-gaff, but went in for the light, sparkling, refreshing wines of the country. He, indeed, had cause above and beyond us all, for viewing everything through *couleur de rose*, in an enchanted oriental atmosphere; for he alone had received a telegram burdened with good news: news that some have waited for all their lives, and left the world still waiting.

The moments sped, darkness fell, and the moon rose round as a shield, full of a "divine effulgence;" apparently twice the size, and giving twice the light of a northern atmosphere. Now for the first view of the Alhambra by moonlight. Once more we ascended the grove. The birds were hushed, but the brook still sang its song. Here and there might be heard the twang of a guitar, and groups of idlers lounged about the walls overlooking the avenue and the town. Some of them appeared suspicious, as they cast backward glances at us over their shoulders. Were any of them the mysterious, treacherous banditti, lying in wait for one's life and one's money, foretold by Pyramid prophetic? They looked the character to the very life. There were women as well as men; bold, gipsy-looking women, sauntering arm in arm up and down beside the walls of

the Palace of Charles V., breaking out every now and then into that wailing song, so weird, so eminently disagreeable. These, harmless enough, were taking the evening air and enjoying the moonlight. But presently, when our number had diminished to two, and under the shadow of the trees we seemed to see brigand forms and the



gleam of stiletos dodging about, I felt glad of the sword-stick Pyramid had pressed upon me, and almost repented having declined the revolver.

But this was later on, in the small hours of the night. For the present we were a goodly number and a safe; and whatever might be lurking in the minds of these gentlemen of the grove, they confined their polite attentions to looks only. On we went, in the full moonlight glory, past the long, straight walls of Charles V.'s palace, and, turning to the right, entered a short pathway, terminating in a modest portal. A bell echoed in the night silence, the doorway opened noiselessly and as if by magic: and in a moment, one by one, we entered upon enchanted ground, and passed into another world.

A DULL SPRING DAY.

BY THE AUTHOR OF "COUNTESS VIOLET."

IT ought to have been a spring day, but it was not. People dated their letters the 10th of April, but the boldest crocus shivered as it stood, for a steady wintry wind penetrated every corner.

In London, the situation was rendered more inconsolable by a thick fog; and as the previous day had been blest with a gentle shower, and a genial glimpse of sunlight afterwards, the public made the most of their grievance, and had our favourite topic, the weather, continually uppermost.

It is all very well for foreigners to laugh at us for always speaking of the weather when we meet; but only a few of them can guess what a charmingly varied subject it is with us. As we never rise in the morning without three anxious thoughts—What is the sky like? What does the glass show? and, What is the last warning from America?—weather may be said to form part of the earnest business of our lives.

In a comfortable dining-room two girls were earnestly conversing. One, bright and dark, with a clever face and charming figure, was seated on the table; and in that position was enabled to look down upon a small, fair beauty, who had happened to don a becoming spring costume in the east wind, and had consequently caught a violent cold.

"It is too provoking!" she murmured, in a thick tone; "I shall have a sealskin jacket and a lace mantle side by side all the summer, after this, for fear of accidents."

"Nonsense, Gladys! You will be all right to-morrow."

"Very likely," said Gladys, resentfully; "but that is a day too late. *He* is going to call to-day, Olive."

"Which 'he,' dear?" innocently demanded the cousin.

"Never mind. Someone who said he would call this morning. And now I can't see him!"

"Why? You're not ill; you are only ——"

"A fright! Look at my nose!"

Certainly, it was swollen. There was a watery, feeble look about the eyes, too, that denoted the condition we all know so well; the frame rendered limp and helpless by unexpected sneezing, dainty dishes tasteless, and gruel and mustard the only things to be cultivated. We stupidly listen to the finest conversation with lips partially open, vacantly wondering whether a cough or a sneeze will be the next shock.

A loud double knock caused Gladys to jump from her chair.

"There he is! Do run up to the drawing-room, Olive! Mother won't be there for hours; he is so early."

"My dear Gladys, can't he wait till my aunt ——"

"Please, Miss Olive," interrupted the footman, "will you be so good as to go to the drawing-room, my mistress says?"

Away went Olive, laughing to herself. Was she not the poor, dependent relative, obliged to be ready for any emergency? Still, she lingered on the staircase, smelt the flowers, and pulled off a dead leaf or two. Gladys's lovers did not interest Olive as a rule—there were so many of them—and Olive had a romantic little secret of her own: a secret which had been as a talisman to her for the two years that had elapsed since she lost her father and her far-away home in a country parsonage.

"Some fair-haired boy is clinging nervously to his hat, I suppose," she ruminated scornfully, as she mounted the last flight. "What a disappointment it will be when he sees *me*!"

So, with a slightly mocking smile on her pretty mouth, she turned the handle of the door.

Wondrous change! No boy stood to meet her, but a fine, bronzed man; and Olive turned pale and trembled.

"*You*, William! Gladys said ——"

"Never mind what the pretty cousin said, my darling; I owe her a debt of gratitude for telling me where to find you."

And such unmistakable love and happiness shone in the eyes meeting her own that all Olive's resolution was needed to enable her to continue.

"Sir William, did ——"

"What have I done that you should call me names?"

"I mean," stammered Olive—"did you get my letters after my father's death?"

"Not until yesterday," gravely responded Sir William, a look of pain crossing his fine face. "There has been treachery, my dear. But all that is over now, and ——"

A loud rustle of silk and jingle of bangles caused Olive to start aside; and she made her escape from the room as her voluminous aunt entered it.

Gladys, in the morning-room, was looking out through a crack of the door as Olive appeared.

"Isn't he handsome?" hoarsely whispered the beauty.

"No. Yes—not very!" gasped Olive, running past and up stairs, as fast as she could go.

"Olive!"

It was no use to call her, for she locked herself in her chamber until tea-time; when her aunt, Mrs. Cornwallis, informed her that, as Gladys could not possibly go that night to the ball for which they were engaged, she might go in her place.

"I should not go at all, but Sir William Maynard had arranged to

accompany us," said Mrs. Cornwallis, gloomily drinking her tea. "It is really *too* provoking that Gladys should have caught this cold."

Olive said nothing. She felt almost guilty; yet she had not planned or plotted for her present happiness.

When the carriage was announced, Olive, in her pretty ball-dress, entered the drawing-room, where her aunt and Sir William Maynard were waiting.

"How long you have been, Olive!" cried Mrs. Cornwallis.

"I have only my gloves to button now, aunt," replied Olive.

"Allow me," said Sir William, and Mrs. Cornwallis swept on towards the door while the gloves were being fastened. When the young people entered the carriage, Olive's blushing face was revealed by the light of the lamps.

"Your gloves took some time!" remarked her aunt, drily.

"There were eight buttons to each, dear madam," said Sir William, impressively. "And as I fastened the sixteenth, Olive promised to be my wife."

"Your wife!" faltered Mrs. Cornwallis; "Olive!"

"Sir William was poor papa's pupil long ago, Aunt Clara," Olive shyly explained. "We have known each other many years."

Aunt Cornwallis, who has always looked down upon her niece because her father profited by his clerical education and took pupils (instead of enjoying his poverty, as his family would have preferred), offered her congratulations somewhat grudgingly; but recovered herself later in the evening at finding her own importance increased by the brilliant marriage her niece was about to make.

NIGHTFALL.

SOFT dews are falling,
Song-birds are calling,
Hushed is the hour when daylight has fled:
Wild roses paling,
Perfume exhaling,
One by one lightly their petals they shed.

Lo! the sun dying,
O'er cloudlets flying
Flings his red banner till crimson they be:
Hush! daylight fadeth,
Darkness invadeth
Earth, as the night falls on meadow and lea.

E. L.

MRS. CARR'S COMPANION.

BY M. G. WIGHTWICK, AUTHOR OF "IN LANDS OF PALM."

CHAPTER VII.

MRS. CARR'S "PLAIN SPEAKING."

VIOLA was not so easily to forget the uncomfortable episode of her interview with Colonel Kane's nephew at the railway station.

Rose Egerton recovered from her cold, and as soon as she could leave her room, started to pay the long-talked-of visit to her old schoolfellow at South Kensington, just in time to escape two or three days of dreary fog and incessant rain, during which no visitors penetrated into the Archdeacon's household, except his neighbours in the Close, who, being weather-bound, took the opportunity of dropping in for tea and talk. Even Mrs. Carr came in for her share of callers, bringing choice morsels of gossip to regale the recluse. Colonel Kane, his attraction to St. Brenda's gone, remained at the Abbey, superintending various alterations, which were to make the place more worthy of his future bride. His nephew also was absent, spending a fortnight's leave in town.

On one of these afternoons, Mrs. Carr sat propped up as usual close to the fire, looking discontentedly every now and then towards the window, where a monotony of falling rain-drops made a cheerless prospect.

"Where can Miss Keith be?" she exclaimed, for at least the twentieth time within an hour. "Walton! do go to her room and see if she is not back. I can't understand it."

With a suppressed sigh, Walton obeyed her impatient mistress, and now returning from her quest for the fifth time, was accompanied by the object of it.

"I am sorry to have left you so long, Mrs Carr," began Viola. "I had to go to seven shops before I could match your ribbon; and the rain was so heavy that when I came home I was obliged to change my dress."

"H'm! I thought, perhaps, you were again detained by company more agreeable than mine. You can go, Walton. Come here, child!" Then, scarcely waiting for the maid to be out of hearing: "What is all this I hear about you? Don't you know it is against Lady Mary's rules for her young people to be gadding at the station after dusk, as you did the other day? Especially when they make themselves conspicuous by *têtes-à-tête* with young men! What have you to say for yourself, pray?"

"I went to the station because your niece asked me to get her a

book," Viola answered, gently. But the soft answer did not avert the wrath which had been accumulating for an hour past.

"Not expecting, of course, to find Captain Kane there?" was the next question, uttered with biting emphasis. Viola was silent, though her colour rose as usual beneath the gaze of those keen eyes.

"No defence, I see. No; wait a minute." Viola, with head proudly raised, was turning away; there were limits even to her endurance; but Mrs. Carr caught her arm and held her fast, so that she must have used force to free herself. "It is but right you should know that you have made yourself the talk of the Close; aye, and of St. Brenda's also, for aught I know."

As Mrs. Carr worked herself up she raised her voice, and disregarding the closing of the ante-room door and the sweep of a dress which announced someone's approach, continued:

"In *my* time it was considered unmaidenly and immodest for girls to run after young men, or to put themselves in the way of being talked about. And you are quite mistaken if you imagine that Captain Kane admires you; for Rose once asked him, and he said he did not. I dare say my plain speaking is not agreeable, but it is my duty to warn you for your own good; so pray remember to give me no such cause of complaint in future."

Mrs. Carr having thus done "her duty," with a pleasure and zest arising, perhaps, from a satisfied conscience, loosed her hold of her companion's arm; and, quivering with indignation, Viola turned to find herself face to face with Lady Mary—Lady Mary, whose expression told that she had heard all! Viola could bear no more.

Shielding her burning cheeks with her hands, she hurried past, looking neither to right nor left, and gaining her own room, flung herself upon the couch in an agony of grief.

Passionate sobs shook her slight frame as she cowered among the cushions, hiding her face from the daylight, and so absorbed that she did not even hear a light tap at the door, and a step on the floor beside her.

"Miss Keith! What is the matter? I am afraid my aunt has been tormenting you, as usual!"

That clear, high-bred voice could only belong to Olive Egerton, and hers was the compassionate hand laid so gently on Viola's hot head. But she only pressed her face into the pillows, to conceal the tears which were now falling fast.

"I was in the ante-room when you rushed past," Olive continued; "and—I could not help hearing what Aunt Charlotte said——"

"Oh! she was cruel! insulting!" gasped Viola, between her sobs. "That man, too, for whom I could never feel anything but contempt!"

"Never mind what she says; it is only her horrid way!"

"But your mother!—Mrs. Carr often says disagreeable things when we are alone—but what can your mother think of me! I almost wish—I—had never—come here!"

"Don't say that, Viola!—I may call you Viola, may I not?—My mother will forget in time, though for a while, perhaps, she may think hardly of you. That is, if it is not all Close gossip, if—if you did really ——"

Viola groaned. "Yes, I did really meet him—there's no denying it, though it was not, as Mrs. Carr said, because—Ah! how *dared* she say it! How can I ever look your mother in the face again, and have her think such cruel things of me!" Then, suddenly lifting a pathetic tear-stained face: "Miss Egerton! I can't explain why I went, but you don't believe *that* of me, do you?"

The painful colour spread once more over cheek, and brow, and throat, as she put out a timid hand in deprecation of Olive's harsh judgment. Olive, moved partly by pity for the victim, partly by indignation against her oppressor, stooped and drew Viola into a warm embrace.

"Never fear; I won't believe anything but that you are an innocent victim of Aunt Charlotte and the St. Brenda gossips. She has had heaps of visitors this afternoon, all brimful of malice, no doubt. It's the weather. Why, I myself feel quite uncharitable—towards Aunt Charlotte, at all events. Cheer up, you poor child!"

Viola clung to her with piteous helplessness, and for a moment the aching head sank wearily on Olive's shoulder. Then, recovering, she drew herself up and dried her tears, as though ashamed of having given way.

"How kind you are! Thank you so much! I must try and bear it, for it is my own fault, after all. But, oh! what shall I do if Lady Mary speaks to me about it?"

Olive looked grave. "I am afraid you must be prepared for that. 'Mamma is very strict about such things; but she is just, and she could not be spiteful, like Aunt Charlotte. Trust her as much as you can, and remember that you have one friend who will not think the worse of you, let Aunt Charlotte say what she may.'"

Viola's fears were not realised; but as days went on she came to think the alternative even worse, and almost longed for an opportunity of justifying herself. From that unlucky afternoon there dated a change in Lady Mary's manner to Viola, who found the relapse from gracious friendliness into cold looks and severe politeness very hard to bear. Yet appearances were against her, she knew, and justified Lady Mary's displeasure; but, oh! it was hard to lose the coveted place in her esteem for so slight a cause! "Just, too, as I really think she was beginning to like me a little!" mused Viola, disconsolately. "She has always called me 'my dear' lately, instead of that formal 'Miss Keith,' which grates upon me so dreadfully. Now that is all at an end, and I must begin again at the very beginning, even if I am able to stay here at all!"

Yet, in the midst of her dejected musings, came the recollection of Olive's kind attempts at consolation, bringing a cheering sense of

comfort to her desolate, sore heart. It was needed in the dreary experience which followed.

Mrs. Carr, having vented her ill-humour, reverted no more to the subject of her lecture, but Lady Mary's silence or frigid speech alike breathed disapproval; it was evident that her trust in Viola was gone. Rose, amid the enjoyment of her London visit, living in a whirl of excitement from morning to night, little guessed, or even cared, for the heavy penalty which Viola was paying for her indiscretion. She had other things to occupy her; and it is to be surmised that, in these days, her thoughts seldom dwelt long upon St. Brenda's or any-one belonging to it.

Olive, on the contrary, with the generous chivalry of her nature, warmed to Viola in her trouble, making unusual demonstrations of friendship. She was quick to note the nervous trembling of the expressive mouth, the instantaneous flushing and paling of the cheek, which told that a laconic answer or chilling glance had wounded Viola's sensitive feelings; and her silent championship often served to temper the bitter blast of Lady Mary's displeasure.

"I wonder you care so much," said Olive, one day, when Viola's gentle, fawn-like eyes had silently filled with tears as Lady Mary swept away, after administering one of the cold rebuffs which the poor girl found it so hard to endure.

"Ah! you do not know!" answered Viola, with a sigh that was eloquent. "I did so value your mother's good opinion; and now it is gone, perhaps for ever! She disapproves of me—she does not even care for us to be much together."

"What nonsensical idea will you take into your head next, I wonder!" was Olive's vigorous comment.

"Did you not notice how displeased Lady Mary looked at lunch, when you called me by my Christian name? She is afraid we shall become too intimate, and that I shall harm you. Oh! why did Mrs. Carr try to poison her mind against me!"

Indeed, it was evident that any open manifestation of Olive's sympathy for Viola was displeasing to her mother. Once or twice she interfered to prevent the girls making a shopping expedition together, or she would throw some hindrance in the way of a proposed walk. For some time, unsuspecting Viola had been unconscious of these manoeuvres, but she now began to realise with acute pain that the obstacles thrown in the way of her friendly intercourse with Olive were not accidental.

It was well that Captain Kane's absence spared her the embarrassment of meeting him under present circumstances. When he came in unexpectedly one evening, about three weeks later, bringing a message from his uncle to Rose (who had only returned that day) about a skating expedition that was to come off on the following morning, Viola had become so absorbed in her troubles themselves as to have forgotten that he was the original cause of them. She

met him, therefore, with complete unconcern, coolly acknowledged his greeting, and a moment later had completely forgotten his existence in her amusement at something the Archdeacon was saying.

Looking up suddenly, a few minutes later, she found Lady Mary's eyes fixed upon her with a curiously searching expression. Recollection awoke with a rush, she started and coloured, and bent her head over her work.

"Miss Keith, will you hold this skein of silk for me?"

It was Lady Mary's voice, the first time for two or three weeks that she had voluntarily addressed her. Grateful for even this mite of returning good-will, Viola came eagerly forward to do the little service, thankful to find herself shielded from observation in the quiet corner by Lady Mary's work-table, able at leisure to recover her serenity, while the hum of talk continued all around her. By the time the silk was ready for use she had completely forgotten herself again, and could retire upstairs comparatively happy, with the echo of Lady Mary's good-night, in kinder tones than she had heard from her for many a day, still sounding in her ears.

CHAPTER VIII.

A CATASTROPHE.

THE frost continued. A slight shower of snow had fallen during the night and picked out with unerring pencil each beautiful detail of the Cathedral architecture. The noble grey towers rose outlined in snow against the clear blue sky; the delicate tracery of the leafless trees in the Close sparkled and shone. Eleven silver-clear strokes from St. Brenda's great clock-tower rang through the frosty air, and at the same moment the jingling bells of Colonel Kane's smart sleigh announced the departure of the skating-party.

Rose, brighter and prettier than ever wrapped in handsome furs, sat in front beside the sleigh's owner, admiring his spirited horses as they bounded forward. Olive occupied the back seat with John Thorold, whom Colonel Kane at the last moment had invited to join the party. A groom was to accompany them as outrider. Mrs. Bythesea, who had volunteered to act as chaperone, was already en route with a party of young people, and Captain Kane and some of his brother officers were also to meet them at the place of rendezvous—a large piece of water hidden among the hills some eight miles away.

The day passed more quickly with the merry party of skaters picnicking and enjoying themselves in the bright open country, indifferent to cold or fatigue, than with some of those they had left behind in the Close. Lady Mary had made the best of herself during breakfast that neither of her girls might lose their day's

pleasure on her account, but now that the party was safely under weigh she confessed to a nervous headache, and forswearing luncheon and visitors, retired to her own room, hoping that entire rest and quiet might restore her before the skating-party returned to a late dinner. Her own maid was away for a holiday, which, perhaps, accounted for her small personal arrangements being less comfortable than usual. A stupid housemaid had built up her fire with more zeal than discretion, so that it roared like a furnace and made the room almost unbearable. In self-defence she was obliged to leave her door open. For some little time the sounds in the house prevented her from falling into the much-longed-for sleep, and before the uneasy, disturbed slumber had half run its course she was roused again by the noise of the Venetian blinds flapping against the window and falling like sledge-hammers upon her aching head.

A light step sounded in the corridor. "Walton! is that you?" she called in despair.

A slight figure that certainly did not belong to Walton appeared in the doorway, and was mirrored in the old-fashioned cheval-glass opposite Lady Mary's sofa. "It is I," said Viola Keith's gentle voice. "Shall I call Walton for you?"

"Yes, if you will. I want her to alter these blinds. The noise they make is distracting."

Viola hesitated, then stepped shyly across the threshold.

"May I arrange them for you, Lady Mary?"

A day or two ago she would not have ventured the offer for fear of a rebuff, but that one little kindness overnight had emboldened her.

"You may try, if Walton is not there."

Quietly and quickly closing the door behind her, she opened the window and fastened the blinds to their supports, so that they still kept the room in pleasant twilight.

"That is better, thanks."

Lady Mary shut her eyes with a sigh of relief. As the soft foot-fall paused near her couch she opened them again. "Do you see any eau-de-Cologne anywhere? My maid is out, and Susan is so stupid."

Viola found the bottle on the dressing-table and put it within reach.

"Ah! thank you!"

Lady Mary's eyes closed again and her brows contracted with pain. The beautiful statuesque face looked so severe in repose that Viola half-wondered at her own audacity as, taking a handkerchief from a sachet which lay near, she mixed some of the eau-de-Cologne with water and laid the cool application with careful fingers upon Lady Mary's burning forehead. A murmur of thanks acknowledged the venturesome act.

Some minutes went by, the pleasantest Lady Mary had experienced all day. Then, the pain somewhat allayed, she opened her eyes. "You here still, Miss Keith?"

"Yes. Can I do nothing more for you before I go?" The tones were wistful and betrayed more trepidation than Viola was aware of.

Lady Mary smiled inwardly. She was accustomed to be as much feared as liked by her surroundings, and perhaps rather prided herself upon the feeling of awe she inspired. "No, no. You can spend your leisure time more pleasantly than in this warm room. Go and enjoy yourself."

The prohibition was not so decided but that it left an opening for another attempt.

"Indeed, Lady Mary, if you would only let me stay and wait on you, I should like nothing else half so well!"

The eager voice made its impression. "But you were going out," said Lady Mary, half inclined to yield.

"No matter; I would far rather be useful to you here."

"Well, you may read to me a little, if you like. I cannot sleep while my head is so troublesome. There was a grey book lying somewhere——"

"Here it is; Kingsley's life. I will begin where the mark is put in. But first let me moisten the handkerchief again."

After the first few pages, Viola's reading purposely became less animated, her pleasant voice fell gradually into a soothing monotone, and before long she had the satisfaction of seeing the serene expression and hearing the deep regular breathing which told that her listener slept. Even then she would not risk disturbing her by a sudden pause. Very gradually she lowered her voice till it died away into silence, and then she sat on, not liking to move, watching the sleeper's placid, beautiful face, with an admiration she would not have dared express. "Oh! if she would only let me love her!" she murmured to herself. "If she would love me ever so little!"

Unconsciously as she gazed the tears gathered in her eyes and began to fall gently and noiselessly like a summer shower. She dared not move to brush them away, and her face was still wet, and her eyelashes dewy when presently Lady Mary's voice made her start, and she found the deep hazel eyes, which were the very counterpart of Olive's, open and fixed upon her, enquiringly.

"What is it, my dear? You have helped me to such a refreshing sleep! What can I do for you in return?"

To Lady Mary's surprise, Viola came and knelt beside the couch, hiding her face. "Oh, Lady Mary! Are you not ever going to forgive me?" she cried, in a choked voice.

Lady Mary sat up, wondering greatly, yet half-smiling.

"Why, child! What is my good opinion to you that you should care so much about it?"

Viola raised her tear-stained face with an agonised, searching expression towards the pale one bending over her. She seemed to have formed some desperate resolution. But before she could open her

lips a tap at the door startled them both. Ah! on what strange momentary chances the events of life seem sometimes to hang! She rose, brushed away her tears, and composed herself once more into Mrs. Carr's quiet, reserved companion.

"Come in!" cried Lady Mary, impatiently.

"It is Captain Kane, my lady," announced Susan from the doorway. "I said you gave orders not to be disturbed, but he wants to see you very particular."

Lady Mary was on her feet even before Susan had finished speaking: "Captain Kane! and alone! Something must have gone wrong with the skating party!" Gathering up the shawl which Viola wrapped round her, she hastened downstairs, and Viola, too anxious to remain behind, slowly followed. Reaching the foot of the stairs, she heard Lady Mary's voice at the other end of the hall exclaiming, "Safe! Rescued! What do you mean? Captain Kane, tell me at once what has happened!"

In a moment Viola was at Lady Mary's side, fearing for her the effect of any agitation. She need not have been afraid. The hand which had unconsciously grasped hers tightened its hold, but the tall queenlike figure gave no other evidence of emotion. Captain Kane's story was soon told, though even his fluency failed sometimes under the gaze of those earnest eyes.

There had been an accident. During a game of cross-touch in the early part of the afternoon, Rose Egerton, in chasing her challenger, had unwarily skated too near a corner of the pond where the ice was thin; it broke under her weight, and she fell into the water. The object of her pursuit had meantime glided swiftly away, the game swept the other players to the further side of the pond, and for a few moments no one noticed her disappearance. When the meaning of the sharp, sudden cry of distress, half-drowned in the ring of many merry voices, became known, and the skaters hurried to the spot in alarm and agitation, it was to find Olive (who had fortunately been resting close at hand, near the bank) bending over the dark hole in the ice, her left arm wound firmly round the branch of a tree, which luckily stretched just above the water, and her right hand grasping her sister, who had by this time risen to the surface.

"It was the most plucky thing possible!" said Captain Kane, enthusiastically. "There was only the torn edge of thin ice between her and the water, but when I and another fellow would have jumped in to the rescue, she called to us to stop, and remained in that dangerous position until Thorold came running up with a ladder he had brought from the boat-house. Then Miss Egerton cried out that he must make haste, for her strength was failing her. He laid the ladder across the hole, crept out upon it as cautiously as he could, and dragging your daughter out of the water by a wonderful exertion of strength, put her safe into my uncle's arms. He had not been on

the pond when the accident happened, and had just come up, almost distracted at learning Miss Egerton's danger.

"And Rose—she is safe, you say?"

"Yes; and none the worse—she told me so herself. Her sister is the chief sufferer."

"Olive!"

The ladder was short, and as Thorold was about to creep back towards the bank, the ice cracked again, just where the foot of it rested, and in another moment—no one knows how it happened—both he and Miss Egerton were struggling in the water. I think she must have fainted with the pain of her arm, for when he brought her to the surface a minute later, she seemed quite unconscious. By that time ropes and help were at hand; we dragged them out, and Thorold, dripping like a shaggy Newfoundland, would let no one but himself carry her to the cottage, fortunately not far off. She had revived before I left, and bade me give you her love and beg you would not be anxious about her."

"You left them there?" Viola wondered at the calm, composed tones.

"My uncle was afraid to run the risk of cold in an open sleigh. He hoped you would send the carriage for them as soon as possible with dry clothes and any comforts you can think of. Mrs. Bythesea is looking after them, but they are in a miserable hole—no accommodation of any kind. Miss Egerton and her sister cannot remain there even for the night. I am on my way to barracks to keep an appointment and volunteered to bring you the message."

A little group had gathered in the hall while Captain Kane was speaking. Almost before he had ceased, one messenger had hurried away to order the carriage, another to hunt up pillows and wraps. Lady Mary began enquiring for Mr. Thorold.

"I should like to thank him. Did he come back with you?"

"No, he rode off at once for the doctor, without even waiting to change his clothes. His cool courage was really admirable, but Miss Egerton carried off the honours with us all. It was she who thought of the ladder. Without her pluck and presence of mind all would have been lost."

Lady Mary's face was eloquent, but this was not the moment for enthusiasm. She turned to Viola and said quietly: "Will you go in the carriage, Miss Keith, and bring them back for me? I can perhaps be more useful making preparations at home."

Viola gratefully accepted the commission, which she took as a proof of restored confidence, and while Captain Kane still lingered, re-entered the hall equipped for her drive.

"You have been very quick, my dear. Are you well wrapped for this cold night? She deserves to be cared for, my kind nurse, who took such care of me this afternoon." And with Captain Kane and all the household looking on, she stooped to give Viola one of those

kind caressing pats of approval which she had learned to prize so highly.

The smile of content which the touch provoked was still lingering on Viola's face as, in the midst of cushions and shawls and rugs, she set out on her long, dark drive. It was no time to be thinking of herself, yet the impression of Lady Mary's looks and words dwelt with her still and would not be banished. "If I had but had time to tell her all!" she sighed to herself. "I might have found courage while she spoke so gently. Ten minutes more and my fate might have been decided, and now who knows when such an opportunity may occur again!"

CHAPTER IX.

"MAIN DE FEMME, MAIS MAIN DE FER."

COLONEL KANE was pacing up and down near the little cottage, which was the sole place of shelter among the wintry hills, listening impatiently for the sound of wheels. He came forward eagerly as the carriage stopped and looked unmistakably relieved at sight of Viola.

She enquired for the sisters. Most of his anxiety, as was natural (though quite uncalled for), was reserved for Rose, but he spoke warmly of Olive's heroism as he ushered Viola to the door of an apartment forming the kitchen and sole living-room of the labourer's family, which his wife had given up to the ladies. While Colonel Kane went back to the carriage for blankets and wraps, Viola made her way into the dimly-lighted room where the sisters had found refuge. Rose, enveloped in shawls, sat on one side of the fire; Olive, almost suffocated by a loan collection of furs and wraps contributed by all the party, was lying on an impromptu couch in front of it. The woman had done her best, but that best was not very easy for Olive. She was awake, and brightened at once when she saw who the visitor was, raising her face to receive Viola's kiss, which was given in some agitation. The face was almost colourless, but the eyes were shining with a soft lustre which surprised Viola.

"That is right, Miss Keith, she deserves to be petted!" cried Rose from her seat in the chimney-corner. "Where should I have been but for her?" and she turned her lovely glistening eyes affectionately upon her sister.

"And you?" asked Viola going towards her in turn; "have you quite recovered?"

"Quite; I would go out this minute if Colonel Kane did not fuss so over me. Poor Olive is the only victim. She does not say much about it, but I know that her arm is dreadfully painful. She has strained the muscles badly—all for me!" Her eyes filled with tears. Viola's look anxiously followed hers, and Olive answered it.

"Oh! it is nothing much, and quite easy to bear when I think how much worse things might have been," she said, bravely. "Rose is safe, that is enough. I was so afraid she would get discouraged and lose her hold on me, and my strength could not have held out much longer."

"The ladder was a very happy thought," said Mrs. Bythesea. "It was so lucky you remembered having seen it lying near the boat-house."

"More than lucky," said Olive to herself.

Colonel Kane came to the door with a bag and some shawls from the carriage, and Mrs. Bythesea went to take them from him. He enquired wistfully if Rose were rested enough to dress and come and talk to him a little. The labourer's wife had been boiling some water, and they were all to have a cup of tea before starting, from the supply Lady Mary had sent.

"I will come in five minutes," cried Rose, answering for herself. "Anything is better than this stuffy little room, and well wrapped, I can take no harm out of doors."

Her hasty toilet was soon completed, and when she had gone to join Colonel Kane, Mrs. Bythesea following to assist in the tea-making, came the question of Olive's: a more lengthy affair, since the injury to her arm made every movement painful. Notwithstanding Viola's efforts to save her as much as possible, Olive looked quite faint and exhausted by the time she was arrayed in the warm woollen dress and wraps which her mother had sent, and Viola saw that it was advisable to get the drive home over as soon as possible.

With Colonel Kane's help she arranged the piles of cushions and rugs so as to form a couch, and both were relieved when Olive, somewhat revived by the hot tea, was safely bestowed upon it, while Rose and Viola made themselves as small as possible in the remaining corners. Colonel Kane undertook to drive Mrs. Bythesea, whose party had long ago started homewards. The lamps of his sleigh were often visible at the turns of the road just in advance, and more than once, at the foot of a steep hill, he handed the reins to his groom and came to the carriage window to enquire after its inmates. Olive always answered for herself in cheerful tones, but between times her animation subsided, and the long drive, made more tedious still by the heavy state of the roads, was almost a silent one. Though she made little complaint, her sigh of relief when the carriage at last rolled under the great gateway of the Close, told them something of her suffering.

Colonel Kane was at the door ready to receive Rose, who sprang quickly down and hastened in to reassure her mother with a sight of her, while he waited to help her sister. Someone else, who was standing by, sprang forward to assist him. The darkness hid Olive's sudden change of colour, but Viola could not help perceiving her start and thrill as she allowed herself to be helped down and almost

carried into the house by her two supporters. Once inside, their task was done, and they saw no more of her.

Lady Mary seemed jealous of any hands but her own tending Olive that night. As usual, her looks and touch spoke for her, and were full of the proud love and tenderness she perhaps could not have expressed in any other way, for words from the most eloquent lips are sometimes but poor, inadequate symbols. She carried her off to her room, and never ceased her tender ministering until she had seen Olive safely in bed and comparatively comfortable, watching the firelight dance and flicker upon the familiar walls.

Then Olive became aware all at once of the weary lines upon her mother's face.

"Mother, it is past ten o'clock, and I know that your head is aching. Kiss me and go to bed at once."

"I would rather wait till you are asleep."

"I could not sleep knowing you were sitting up tired out. Look; the bell is within reach. I can send to you if I want anything."

"Then I will go, and come in again the last thing. You look hot and feverish. Pray try and sleep, dear."

"Yes; but send Viola to say good-night to me first. She was so kind this afternoon. There is something very loveable about Viola."

"She is a good little creature, and perhaps I have been judging her rather hardly, though I cannot understand why she should take my displeasure so much to heart. Having owned so much, perhaps you will be satisfied."

Lady Mary met Viola just leaving Mrs. Carr's rooms, and gave Olive's message, warning her not to allow her to talk. But it was evident that sleep was as yet far from Olive's eyes, which shone in the firelight with the same strange happy brightness which Viola had noticed before. She held out her only available hand and drew Viola to a seat on the bed beside her, asking anxiously what had become of the rest? Where was Rose? Had Colonel Kane gone home?—and Mr. Thorold?

An unconscious tremor of the hand holding hers which followed the pause, explained much that had hitherto been mysterious to Viola. She answered demurely that Colonel Kane was still talking to Rose; Mr. Thorold had only waited to hear that she was comfortable, and had then gone home at once.

"He was not hurt?"

"Oh no."

"Did you hear? It was he who saved me."

"Mr. Thorold must have been brave and prompt, but everyone says that you were the real heroine of the day. We are all quite proud of you. Even Mrs. Carr can find no fault this time!"

Before Olive's languid smile had faded, Viola, remembering Lady Mary's injunction, bent over her to say good-night. Olive looked disappointed.

"Do not go. I had so much to say and shall not sleep yet awhile. Viola! tell me, do you think that unequal marriages turn out well? I mean, where the husband, say, is superior in position to the wife?" Her eager eyes scanned Viola's face as she waited in some excitement for the answer.

Viola's breath came quickly for a moment. "Oh! don't ask me!" she cried at last, with averted face. "What makes you think of such a thing?"

It was now Olive's turn to seem embarrassed, but her mother's entrance saved her a reply. Lady Mary looked reproachfully at Viola as she laid her hand on her daughter's burning brow. "I thought you were a good nurse, Miss Keith?"

"Ah! mamma! don't scold Viola! she has been in your black books long enough. It was my fault, too, for she tried to get away. But you must not mind to-night, because I am so happy!"

Lady Mary's silent kiss was unusually demonstrative as she smoothed back the dark hair from the white brow so like her own. Then—she did not quite know if it was to please herself or Olive—out of the fulness of a heart stirred to its very depths with love and gratitude, she stooped once more and, for the first time, pressed another kiss on Viola's cheek. It was not so much the kiss itself as what it signified, which made Viola's heart throb with such exquisite pleasure. A swift, grateful glance from her wistful eyes thanked Lady Mary, as, with a silent good-night to Olive, she hastened away.

Olive, alone presently in the firelight, lay with unclosed eyes watching the flicker of the fitful flames in a not unpleasant reverie. Her arm was burning and painful, but it was not that which kept her spirit wakeful. The physical pain was dulled and deadened by an overmastering sensation of content. Again she felt in imagination the presence of strong arms enfolding her in a firm yet tender clasp, again she heard a voice as if yielding to an irresistible impulse whispering some words that tinged her cheek with colour even here in the solitude of this silent chamber. "*Main de femme mais main de fer! My brave darling, is it you who must be the sufferer?*" A proud triumph swelled her heart to think she had wrung such words from those well-governed lips. "He cares for me! Whatever happens, I know so much at least!" She refused to analyse, or even believe in the thrill of joy which pulsed through her veins at the thought. But at this stage her musings became complicated. How different from all she had ever imagined for herself! This man of no especial descent, without fortune, whose name was not to be found in any red book; as far removed by birth and position from Olive's world as though he lived at the Antipodes. Yet some quaint old lines would keep importunately recurring to her memory, putting to flight the arguments of reason and making themselves heard in spite of everything:

"This man is free from servile bands
Of hope to rise, or fear to fall ;
Lord of himself though not of lands,
And having nothing, yet hath all."

Olive had plenty of time for self-communing in the long watches of that wakeful night, during which her throbbing arm grew more and more painful. Dawn was breaking when at length mind and body found rest in a dreamless sleep, which lasted far into the morning. Would she have slumbered as soundly had she known that the hero of her late reverie was already being whirled to town at express speed ?

On his way to the station, Thorold had paid an early visit of enquiry at the Archdeacon's, but early as it was, Lady Mary was visible—Lady Mary in a gentle, grateful mood, which showed her at her tenderest, as she pressed his hand and spoke her earnest thanks for his courage and heroism. "Dear Olive, too, is most grateful ! She will never forget her obligations to you !"

Obligations ! The word seemed out of place somehow in connection with Olive Egerton, and John disdained the thanks almost roughly. He only waited to enquire with pointed impartiality after the health of both sisters before taking leave to spend the next fortnight in town, trying to banish from his mind all thoughts of the corner-house and its inmates. He was driven to this rather tardy piece of wisdom by a chance remark of Miss Hammond's.

The good, timid creature had meditated the warning for some time before she ventured to utter it one morning, as her nephew was preparing to leave the house.

"I hope—I do hope, John, you are not going to the Archdeacon's too often ?" The faltering tones revealed the effort it cost her to enter upon such a subject with her reserved nephew.

"What do you mean ?" asked Thorold, turning upon her almost fiercely.

"Oh, John ! you know ! I was thinking of—Olive Egerton ! And it is of no use. She refused her cousin, the Honourable Mr. Raleigh, only last year, and everyone said it was because he was only the second son ! She is as proud as Lucifer. Oh, yes ; indeed she is ! and—and, I could not bear that she should scorn you, John."

"I will take care of myself, aunt ; never fear," said her nephew, smiling, but somewhat grimly, as he turned his steps in the wonted direction.

But though he pooh-poohed his aunt's caution at the time, it recurred to him later, and perhaps influenced his thoughts and actions more than he would have cared to acknowledge.

(To be continued.)

AN OXFORD COMMEMORATION.

"BUT, mamma, we've been all over Europe, and enjoyed ourselves everywhere, and I can't see why we should not expect to have the same good fortune at Oxford."

The speaker was a young American girl of one-and-twenty, who, as she put this question to her mother, tilted her pretty head on one side, and looked decidedly accustomed to have her own way.

"I have tried to explain to you," Mrs. Durant expostulated, "that an English university town is like nowhere else in the world, that ——"

"Is the very reason why I want to see it," broke in the first speaker, Alma. "We've been to so many places which are the same things over again with different names: especially lately. I declare last night I could not remember whether we were in Worcester or Gloucester! Now, if I only recollect Oxford, by not having understood it, that will be something, wont it?"

"If you recollect it because you were uncomfortable there, and felt neglected," said Mrs. Durant, as she yielded, as her custom was, to her daughter, "you must not blame me for it. I know perfectly well that to enjoy Oxford a girl wants to have some friends there who will take her about, and we don't know a soul! Why, years ago, when I visited it with your poor father, we had a dozen friends to begin with, and made a dozen more before we left; they went with us everywhere, and showed us everything, and got us all the tickets we wanted, and took us out rowing, and ——"

"Well, mamma, and we must go by ourselves, and find out what we can with the help of your memory and of a guide-book; and the tickets we can't buy we must do without; and instead of rowing, we must walk; and instead of twenty-four friends, we shall have none."

"So long as you are pleased with that prospect, my dear, I am satisfied," said Mrs. Durant; which terse remark summed up her life and its aspirations. She was a widow ruled by this her only child, Alma. And Alma, be it said to her credit, was a kindly and considerate task-mistress, taking care that her own way should be a pleasant one to her mother, and tyrannizing with a gentle tyranny which kept her mother young and sprightly.

There was little which is commonly considered American about either Mrs. Durant or Alma. They came from Boston, where manners and customs are less pronounced than in New York, and they had been so long in Europe that they had lost almost all traces of their nationality. To a nice observer, those that remained the more surely marked them. Alma's clear, pale complexion, and her thin, fine face, with its eager, searching, restless expression, were undeniably striking,

but they might belong to any delicately organised young girl, English or American; her small white hands, and the peculiar, graceful pose of her head, were the product of over the sea only; her voice and her phraseology were the same as everybody else's; but a slight quaint intonation, the smallest rise in the tone of her voice at the end of a sentence, marked very plainly whence she came.

"And I'm glad there *is* something of the American about us," Alma used to say; "or else, when we get home again, we shall be treated like strangers there too, and I'm downright tired of being a stranger everywhere."

As Mrs. Durant had foretold, this feeling of loneliness was especially oppressive in Oxford.

The two ladies took up their quarters at the Mitre Inn, where they had a sitting room overlooking the High Street, and could watch the friendly, happy, careless life which is there carried on.

It was the middle of the summer term, and all the men who were not in for their final schools, and a good many of those who were, were bent upon enjoying themselves. Alma soon learned to know the different types of undergraduates. The spectacled scholar starting off for his solitary exercise in the parks, and longing all the while to be back again at his books; the boating or cricketing man, who ran by in flannels early in the afternoon, and sauntered back, tired and hot, late in the evening; the idle man, the "masher" of Oxford, in fact, who, got up to the last degree, began and ended his afternoon in walking up and down the High Street, and drinking tea in the different rooms; and, lastly, that strange anomaly, who bears no resemblance to anything in the wide world—the æsthete.

All these, and many more besides, Alma watched pass by beneath her window, and was all the while as completely isolated from them and from their life as if she saw them through a camera obscura.

The two ladies took their daily exercise, at first with, and then without the tell-tale red guide-book. They had learned the names of all the colleges by heart, they had been into all the quadrangles and gardens of most of them; but the libraries, the chapels, most of all, the interiors of those fascinating oriel-windowed rooms were closed mysteries to them. It was the same at the river, where, while they watched other ladies being taken by their friends on to the college barges, and into the new University boat-house, they could only keep to the towing-path, and wonder over the mysteries of bumping races and college regattas.

Still, Alma persisted in remaining at Oxford, and assured her mother that she enjoyed seeing life as an outsider.

One afternoon, when term was drawing to a close, and the festivities of the coming Commemoration were already interrupting the ordinary life of the place, Mrs. and Miss Durant strolled along the owing-path towards Sandford Lock.

"Look at that funny little man with the spectacles," said Alma. "What is he going to do in a boat with those young fellows?"

And a more experienced waterman than Alma might indeed have wondered. A small, middle-aged strangely dressed Don (I call him a Don, because that dignity was indisputably obvious in him), who was walking along the opposite bank, had stopped and interchanged a few remarks with two fine young fellows in flannels, who were paddling down stream in a light outrigger dingey. It appeared that the don wanted to get across to the other side, and the undergraduates offered to take him there. Two in a dingey is delightful, but more than that certainly requires care. Whether this was wanting on the part of the don, who was decidedly unaccustomed to boats, or in the young men, who were not averse to any amusement which might turn up, is not known; but certainly, as the dingey neared the shore, where Miss Durant stood watching it, in a very neat and wholly inexplicable manner the poor little don toppled out of it head foremost into the water, black coat, edition of "Catullus," which he held in his hand, wide-awake hat, spectacles, and all! He could not swim, and this the young fellows either guessed or knew, for one of them at once went in after him, and dragged him with all his belongings to shore.

Alma afterwards said she never in her life had seen, and certainly could not reasonably expect to see again, a sight so funny as this little don crawling out on his hands and knees from his unexpected bath, and facing the ladies dripping, disconsolate, and half-drowned!

Mrs. Durant was full of sympathy.

"I'm so sorry for your unfortunate accident," she said to him. "I wish there was something I could do for you."

Alma was carrying a light shawl on her arm, in case they should stay out late and need it; she now came up, and, offering it to him, said, in her sweetest voice: "I hope you will put this round you; it is soft and dry, and may prevent you from catching cold."

The Don looked quite confused at the politeness of this gentle-toned young girl as he accepted the shawl, and stammered out, "Much obliged—much obliged."

"I am sorry I have no wrap for you," said Mrs. Durant to the young fellow, also wet through, who stood by, watching with restrained mirth the quaint scene: "but I dare say you will get yourself warm by running back."

"Warm," he said, smiling; "why, to be wet through in the Summer Term is my normal condition."

Alma, too, smiled at this, and the drenched Don, looking more utterly miserable than ever, lifted his limp, heavy hat to the ladies, and hurried along the towing-path towards Oxford.

"Professor Powis has forgotten to ask for your address," said the young fellow. "I am sure to-morrow morning he will be sending me

all over Oxford to find it, that he may return the shawl. Do you mind telling it me—I belong to his College."

"I am very glad to save you both trouble. I am Mrs. Durant, and we are staying at the Mitre Inn."

Then the young fellow was afraid of forgetting this, and had no paper or pencil with him, and Alma had to supply both; so that altogether there was no little needless delay on his part before he finally got into the boat and sculled off with great vigour, hoping that Alma knew enough about rowing to admire his "form."

The next morning the shawl was returned, with the card of Professor Powis, M—— College, attached to it, and a message of thanks.

The following Sunday was "Show Sunday." Mrs. and Miss Durant knew nothing of the (now obsolete) fashion of parading up and down the Broad Walk on that particular afternoon; but as they sat in their room a messenger brought them up two tickets for the afternoon service at Magdalen Chapel. They were in an envelope, addressed to Miss Durant, "with compliments;" and Alma blushed a little as she saw them, and dressed herself to go out and use them.

"Who do you think sent them you?" her mother asked.

"Why, who could it be, but the nameless young boating man!"

Which conviction may have added zest to her walk to the chapel, but was certainly entirely forgotten during the service, which in every detail was absolutely perfect. The anthem was Mendelssohn's "Hear my Prayer;" and when it was over, Alma remarked, enthusiastically, if irreverently: "I don't believe they could do it better than that in heaven!"

The next day the same messenger brought tickets to Miss Durant, to admit two to the University barge to see the procession of boats, and Alma recognised the young giver of them as he stood up in his college eight and saluted the head of the river, and when he saw her she tried to send him her thanks in a very bright smile.

Wednesday, tickets were sent her, not only for the conferring of the honorary degrees in the theatre, but for the concert at Magdalen in the evening, and a lovely bouquet of flowers to take to the same. Alma was becoming quite embarrassed by all this gratuitous kindness, and her chief desire now was to meet and thank her undergraduate friend.

During the interval between the first and second parts of the concert, she espied Professor Powis coming towards her with ices and claret cup, which he was offering the ladies; she accepted an ice from him, and although he looked as nervous and shy as before, and she scarcely knew if he recognised her, she claimed his acquaintance by hoping that he was none the worse for his accident.

He timidly sat down on a vacant chair beside her and, nursing the bowl of claret cup on his knees, said hurriedly: "No, no, your kindness, you know—it was most unfortunate."

Alma thought it must be this particular subject which he disliked, and tried to put him more at his ease.

"What a lovely, lovely concert this is," she said: "I do not know when I have been so charmed by any music."

"I suppose it is—I am told so." Professor Powis answered, as though he had heard a report which he hardly believed, and not as though he were actually listening to the performance.

"I can't think how you get such beautiful voices, all in one college. And then, the boys, who are they?"

"Oh! one is called Barnes, and another White, and another——"

"I meant, not exactly what their names are, but where do they come from: are they just Oxford boys, or is there a special school here to collect and train them?"

But Alma's sweet presence and voice completely confused Professor Powis. "Oh, I don't know!" he stammered out; "I'm not musical. You must ask Smith."

"But I don't know Mr. Smith."

"Don't you? The man who upset me."

"No; but I want to."

"He ought to be here to-night, only he isn't. He is at one of the balls, I suppose."

"Will you ask him to call upon me," said Alma, with the spirit of a true American. "I particularly want to see him, to thank him."

Presumably, this audacity so completely astonished the Professor that he managed to upset the claret bowl over himself and Alma, and, in a state of confusion which was pitiable, he fumbled in his pockets for the handkerchief he had forgotten to put there. Alma found it impossible not to laugh as she shook herself and wiped her dress, and Mrs. Durant held the bowl for the Professor, and assistance was offered on all sides. He accepted none of it; but muttering, "I will tell Smith to call, and I beg your pardon," he vanished for the rest of the evening.

The next afternoon, looking bright and handsome, and flattered, as well he might be, young Smith called upon Miss Durant. She met him in the middle of the room, offering him her hand frankly, with a smile, which ought to have been, and, I take it, was, very gratifying to him.

"I wanted to see you," she said, "that I might thank you for all your kindness to me."

"My kindness!" he said, in the utmost amazement. "What kindness? I don't understand you!"

"Why in sending us tickets for everything, and flowers, and making us enjoy our Oxford Commemoration, more than I can tell you."

"But I never sent you a ticket for anything in my life!"

"You did *not*!"

"No, assuredly not; I wish I had!"

Alma looked grave and thoughtful for a moment.

"Then Professor Powis did," she said, and involuntarily both she and Smith smiled.

"You must forgive the poor Professor," said Smith: "I'm sure it's the first time he has ever been guilty of such a thing."

"Forgive him! what do you mean? I must thank him, as I meant to thank you."

"And you, I suppose," Smith continued, "are the young lady with whom he distinguished himself last night."

"You have heard about that?" she said. "Well, he was rather shy and clumsy, but he's been very good to me, all the same."

"That I am sure of, and believe me if you want truly to show your gratitude to him you will not let him know you have discovered his secret; a man like Powis would never hear the last of it, if it were to get abroad that he had been anonymously sending you tickets and flowers. He wouldn't indeed."

"And I told him I wanted to thank *you*," Alma went on, following her own thoughts; "no wonder he upset the claret cup in astonishment at my stupidity!" Smith did not look best pleased at this inference, but she continued without noticing his expression: "Mr. Smith, now that Professor Powis knows that I have seen you and must have found out the truth, I cannot be so rude as to leave his kindness unacknowledged. I must write to him, or see him, somehow!"

During the whole of this interview, Smith had been chiefly concerned at his own folly, in having missed the golden opportunity which Alma had credited him with having made such good use of, and he had been anxiously meditating as to how he could make up for lost time. A happy thought now struck him.

"Miss Durant," said he, "will you and your mother come to my rooms to-morrow afternoon to tea, and I will ask Professor Powis to meet you; and you can show him as much gratitude as ever you please, for I will have no one else there."

"How good you are! I'm sure we shall be delighted to accept your invitation—shan't we, mother?" she said, appealing to Mrs. Durant, who had just come into the room.

And with the understanding that he was to call the next day and fetch the ladies, Smith left them. He had only reached the bottom of the stairs when another happy thought struck him, and he came running back and knocked at their room.

"I have just recollected that there is to be a private dance in one of the fellows' rooms in T—to-night," he said. "Will you, Mrs. Durant, bring your daughter to it, if I send you an invitation?"

They demurred a few moments, and then accepted this further kindness. And before the end of the evening, Smith managed to fall completely in love with Alma Durant.

When Professor Powis joined the afternoon tea-party the next day, he had already relinquished his short-lived dream concerning this fair American girl, though it may be not without a sigh, for

middle-aged dons have feelings as well as other people. Alma came up to him, and blushingly acknowledged her mistake, and hoped it was not too late to thank him.

"Ah! Miss Durant, it was not your mistake, but mine and Smith's, which we have both found-out now," he said. "You only imagined things as they ought to have been; and as for your thanks, why all good things improve with keeping."

After which unexampled piece of eloquence, on the part of Professor Powis, to which Smith silently applauded "Hear! hear!" the Professor devoted himself assiduously to Mrs. Durant, and seemed a great deal less shy in talking to her than he had done when he was listening to Alma.

The end of the tale is not very surprising, though it is amusing. Smith married Alma Durant, and Professor Powis married her mother!

H. F.



TREU UND FEST.

SOME blame the years that fly so fast,
And sigh o'er loves and friendships gone;
While others say too long they last,
And wish each day were earlier done.

But thou art none of these—to thee
The past *is* past: past not in vain.
Days lived in life's reality—
What need to wish them here again?

Days hallowed each by noble use—
What need to wish them earlier done?
Who spend their souls in time's abuse
Are eager for to-morrow's sun.

Thy trust and rest unbroken are:
In God's appointed pathway still
Thy constant spirit, like a star,
Moves on accomplishing His will.

A. M. H.

